

# canberra bird notes

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## EDITORIAL

The need for a review of the status of birds in the A.C.T. district has been realised for a long but nothing concrete eventuated until the appointment an adhoc sub committee charged with this task.

The first fruits of that step appear on page 8 of this issue - ten species in the orders Casuariiformes, Podicipitiformes and Pelecaniformes are dealt with. It is stressed that these notes represent the sub-committee findings and are by no means definitive. Readers who disagree are urged to speak up, preferably in print (I'm running short of copy).

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THE BIRDS AT PULLETOP

Val Jenkins Peter Gowland Tony Stokes

Part Two of this article is in the form of a checklist compiled from the information contained within the three lists known to be in existence. The checklist is in three columns. The first column lists species seen in October 1967 and recorded in C.B.N. 1, July 1968. The second column lists species included in a hitherto unpublished 'Preliminary Checklist of the Birds of Pulletop Nature Reserve' (May 1870). This list was compiled by Ranger Allan Morris of the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service from information supplied by C.B.N. 1, A.R, McGill, H. Battam, L. Willen, S. Cramer-Roberts, Ranger C. Bennett and himself. We are most grateful to Mr Morris for allowing us access to it. It is evident that there will be some overlap between the first and second columns.

The third column is a list of the birds seen by the authors in a two-day period at the reserve, from January 26-28, 1971. The following key refers to the status of the species as recorded in the lists quoted and, except for the final column, do not necessarily convey the authors' opinions:-

vc = very common;	ra = rare;	brd = breeding
c = common	rd = resident	pr = pair seen
uc = uncommon	vg = vagrant	x = status not given
fr = frequent	mg = migrant	- = not recorded

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The number preceding each species name is the official RAOU Checklist number. Other figures quoted refer to the number of individuals recorded, A month or months in brackets indicates the time of year in which the species was recorded- The checklist total is 77-

The Checklist	1.	2.	3.
1 Emu	x	vg	2
7 Mallee Fowl	fr	brd(8 pr)	2
30 Peaceful Dove	1	x	-
34 Common Bronzewing	5	brd	2
43 Crested Pigeon	1	uc	-
221 Brown Goshawk	2	x(Aug-Dec)	-
224 Wedgetailed Eagle	3	vg	1
225 Little Eagle	-	-	1
228 Whistling Kite	-	uc(Dec 66)	-
237 Peregrine	2	uc(Oct'67)	-
239 Brown Falcon	xbrd	ucbrd	-
242 Boobook Owl	-	-	2
270 Pink Cockatoo	3brd	rd	pr
273 Galah	xbrd	-	x
274 Cockatiel	8	uc	
291 Mallee Ringneck	2	c	c
295 Redrumped Parrot	2	uc	
296 Mulga Parrot	2	x(Jun-Dec)	2
297 Bluebonnet Parrot	1	uc(Oct'67)	-

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The Checklist	1.	2.	3.
310 Budgerigar	-	uc(Jun'69)	30
313 Tawny Frogmouth	1brd	ucbrd	1
331 Spotted Nightjar	-	-	4
317 Owlet Nightjar	1	uc(Aug-Dec)	1
322 Kookaburra	1	c	-
329 Rainbowbird	20+	mg(Oct-Dec )	X
337 Pallid Cuckoo	2	uc(Aug-Oct)	-
344 Golden Bronze C.	-	-	1
361 Grey Fantail	c	c	-
364 Willie Wagtail	c	c	c
363 Restless Flycatcher	2	uc	-
381 Redcapped Robin	frbrd	rdbrd	c
385 Hooded Robin	4	uc	-
392 Yellow Robin	1	c	1
398 Golden Whistler	1	uc(Oct'69)	-
401 Rufous Whistler	fr	c(Jul-Dec)	vc
402 Red-lored Whistler	rdbrd	cbrd	-
403 Gilbert Whistler	5 pr	cbrd	-
408 Grey Shrikethrush	frbrd	cbrd	c
415 Magpie Lark	X	c	-
419 Crested Bellbird	X	rd	X
424 B/F Cuckooshrike	pr	uc	2

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The Checklist	1.	2.	3.
430 Whitewinged Triller	-	ra(Aug'69)	-
437 Chestnut Quail-thrush	3	c	-
441 Southern Scrub Robin	2-3 pr	ucbrd	1
445 Whitebrowed Babbler	x	rdbrd	
448 Whitefronted Chat	-	vg(Apr'66)	-
463 Western Warbler	frbrd	uc	c
465 Brown Weebill	c	rdbrd	c
466 Eastern Whiteface	-	ra(Dec'66)	1
471 Little Thornbill	fr	c	o
478 Red-tailed Thornbill	x	uc	2
481 Chestnut-tailed Th.	frbrd	c	o
486 Yellow-tailed Th.	7	uc	2
499 Mallee Heathwren	5	ucbrd	-
504 Speckled Warbler	-	-	1
506 Brown Songlark	1	ra(Oct'69)	-
530 Blackbacked Wren	x	rd	x
537 Purplebacked Wren	x	rd	x
566 Yellow-tailed Pard.	xbrd	c	x
567 Striated Pardalote	1	uc(Oct-Dec)	-
574 Eastern Silvereye	-	ra(Apr'66)	-
583 Brownheaded Honeyeater	fr	rd	x
585 Striped Honeyeater	4 pr	uc(Jul&Oct)	-

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The Checklist	1.	2.	3.
594 Whitefronted H.	1	ra(Oct'59)	-
617 White-eared H,	c	rd	c
622 Mallee Honeyeater	cbrd	uc	o
625 Whiteplumed H.	-	uc	-
634 Noisy Miner	-	ra(Apr66)	-
640 Spiny-cheeked H,	x	rd	2
675 Apostle Bird	x	uc	2
590 Raven	xbrd	rdbrd	x
954 Little Raven	x	uc 60(flock)	
691 little Crow	-	uc	-
693 Whitewinged Chough	x	rdbrd	vc
700 Pied Butcherbird	x	uc	-
702 Grey Butcherbird	1	c	-
705 Blackbacked Mag.	2	rd	x
 Species Totals:	 67	 71	 43

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

AUTUMN MOVEMENTS OF THE RED WATTLEBIRD

Steve & Denis Wilson

Movements of the Red Wattlebird Anthochaera carunculata have been noted occasionally in the literature but these movements seem rather indefinite in their nature. The writers have seen moving flocks in the A.C.T. in autumn in various years but again notes do not indicate any constant direction.

On April. 17, 1971, while travelling south from Canberra to Cooma between 0900 and 1100 hrs, we noticed more than twelve flocks of Red Wattlebirds, all flying just above tree height and all moving in a general south-easterly direction. Flocks varied in numbers between ten and 25.

AN EXTENSION OF RANGE OF THE BANDED FINCH

Steve & Denis Wilson

While driving to Bega on April 17, 1971, as we approached Bemboka from Brown Mountain, our attention was drawn to a flock of small birds feeding on long grass by the roadside. Investigation showed that 20 Banded Finches Poephila bichenovii were present in a mixed flock with Yellow-rumped Thornbills Acanthiza chrysorrhoa. The place was near the 24-mile post from Bega.

This matter was discussed with Arnold McGill and he agreed that this represents a considerable extension to the southeast. The previous known southern limit of the species was the Tidbinbilla Fauna Reserve in the Australian Capital Territory.

2, Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T., 2604

THE STATUS OF BIRDS IN CANBERRA AND DISTRICT

Preparation of the second edition of "A Field-List of the Birds of Canberra and District" highlighted the fact that our knowledge of the status of birds in the Canberra district is far from complete. The C.O.G. Committee therefore appointed a sub-committee for the purpose of scanning all the available literature and recording what is known about the status of each species in the area. The sub-committee consists of G.S. Clark, H.A. Nix and S.J. Wilson. The term 'Canberra and District' is taken to cover the area within an easy day's return car trip from Canberra - roughly that shown on the map in the centre pages of the second edition of the fieldlist.

The following notes are the collation of all records available to the sub-committee. Readers may disagree on some of the points and in such a case they are asked to let the sub-committee know. Alternatively they could write a letter or article for Canberra Bird Notes stating how and why they disagree. The status of many birds is not fully known and the sub-committee would be grateful for all information received, especially if it contradicts established ideas.

Sources that have been used include all the references listed as well as those records placed in the observation book which have been well documented. Annual birdlists of the Canberra Branch of the RAOU and Canberra Bird Notes have also been used as source material.



A proper determination of status for some species would require regular observations in one area over a long period,- This is one way in which members can help as the area can be a garden or a lunchtime walk. Anybody interested in doing this and willing to help should get in touch with one of the committee members. Regular observations of common birds in one area contribute more to our knowledge of status than records of first occurrences in the A.C.T.

CASUARIIFORMES

EMU Dromaius novaehollandiae

The emus was a former resident in the district but with increased settlement it disappeared. There are no recent published records of wild birds.

LITTLE GREBE Podiceps novaehollandiae

A very common breeding resident. It frequents lakes, creeks, rivers, dams and swamps - anywhere there is an open stretch of water, which can be quite small in extent. The breeding period seems to be from the beginning of October to the end of February. There is an apparent increase in numbers on open water in winter. Whether this is just birds of the year flocking or whether all birds flock is uncertain.

cont/-

HOARY-HEADED GREBE Podiceps poliocephalus

A common breeding resident. Although it shares the same habitats as the Little Grebe it is more often found on open water, such as large lakes. It is gregarious and nests in colonies in such areas, unlike the Little Grebe which nests in pairs on dams and backwater. The Hoary-headed appears to be highly nomadic as numbers fluctuate considerably. Breeding takes place from early November to January. Colonies have been recorded at Lake George and Lake Bathurst.

CRESTED GREBE Podiceps cristatus

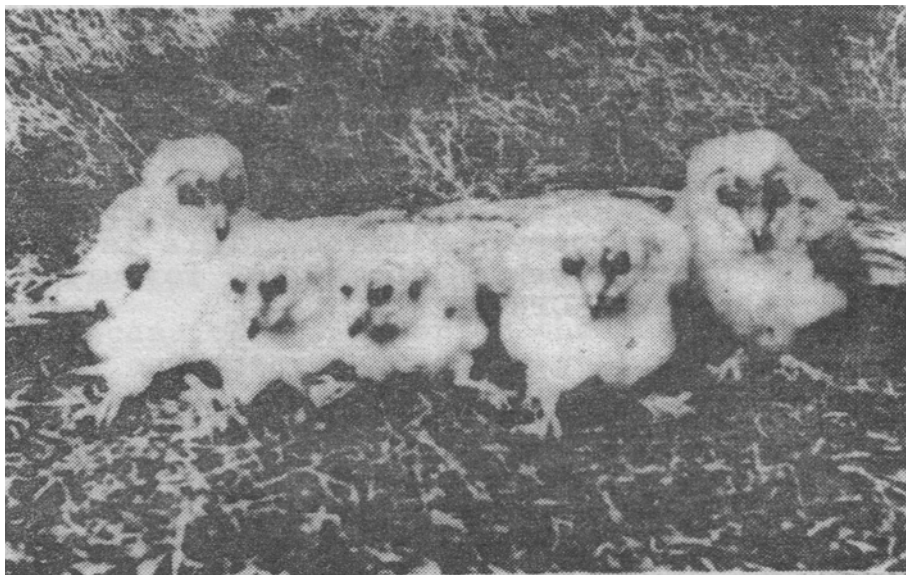
Like the Hoary-headed, this grebe is found on large bodies of water, and it breeds on Lakes George and Bathurst. It appears to be nomadic on these two lakes as numbers may fluctuate considerably, e.g. 447 were present at Lake George on August 4, 1963 (Lamm, 1965), but there are nearly always some birds there. For Lake Burley Griffin there are occasional reports of up to four birds at a time from all parts of the lake except Central Basin. The breeding season in the district extends from the beginning of November to the end of January.

PELECANIFORMES

PELICAN Pelecanus conspicillatus

The Pelican is present throughout the year and is fairly common on the local lakes, but numbers decrease winter. It has attempted to breed twice at Lake George.  
(cont. on p.12)

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The Barn Owl is one species with poorly known population dynamics, A build-up in numbers is often followed by widespread mortality. These young ones were found in a dead tree after it had been felled by a woodcutter at Wal Wal, near Sawtell, VIC. They were photographed and returned to their nesting hollow, now close to ground level and all were reared successfully. Mice were plentiful in the area.

(Story by Jack Wheeler. Picture by Peter Taylor).

PELICAN Pelecanus conspicillatus (cont)

The breeding season appears to be from early August to the end of November, but it is probably dependent on rainfall and water levels. Numbers at Lake Burley Griffin have increased steadily since the lake was established. Although, the species has been present there throughout the year, there are no records between December 1970 and December 1971 apart from single birds in February and March. This is presumably due to construction work in the bird's favourite haunt around Jerrabomberra Creek.

DARTER Anhinga rufa

An uncommon breeding resident which is localised in occurrence. It is found on lakes, large dams and rivers where the water is placid. It has nested in Lake Burley Griffin (Molonglo River) area, and the nesting season appears to be from early January to almost the end of February. Although the bird is not common there are regular reports of its presence in the Molonglo River and occasional reports from Lake George. It has not been recorded at Lake Bathurst.

BLACK CORMORANT Phalacrocorax carbo

This is a very common bird on the local lakes, though less common on the rivers and dams. Breeding extends from October to February, and the last record nesting in our area was at Lake Bathurst in February 1964. Numbers reach a peak from September to November with only scattered individuals between March and July.

LITTLE BLACK CORMORANT Phalacrocorax sulcirostris

A common resident which may breed. This is a bird of lakes, rivers and occasionally dams. There have been unconfirmed reports of breeding in our area but no information is available. The species is less common than carbo, but as in that species numbers tend to decrease in autumn and early winter.

PIED CORMORANT Phalacrocorax varius

An occasional visitor on the larger bodies of water. Birds may occur throughout the year singly or in small groups (maximum recorded -6) with a tendency towards more records in summer (this may be due to increased bird watching activity then). A record of the Black-faced Cormorant Phalacrocorax fuscescens in Jones (1929) probably referred to this species.

LITTLE PIED CORMORANT Phalacrocorax melanoleucos

A very common resident on all stretches of open water including rivers and small dams. Breeding has been recorded only from the Molonglo River although it may nest elsewhere from early January to the end of February. Unlike the 'black' cormorants (carbo and sulcirostris) this species' numbers increase in winter and decrease in spring.

WHITE-EARED HONEYEATER NESTS IN GRASS

Tony Stokes

On the morning of October 28, 1971, eight miles south of Captain's Flat on the road to Jerangle, N.S.W. I found, a White-eared Honeyeater, Meliphaga leucotis, sitting on a nest containing two eggs.

The nest was suspended in the tussock grass *Poa labillardieri* and was woven around a number of the grass blades. It was about six inches above the ground. The tussock was one of a dense stand beneath a grove of Acacias which seemed to hold more appropriate nest site. The whole area was on a well-sheltered gully slope.

Available literature does not contain any reference to the species nesting in grass, though many do mention the fact that it nests close to the ground in bushes.

I would like to thank Kike Lazarides of the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry for confirming the grass species.

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SOGGY SHAG STORY The Black Cormorant reported in C.B.N. 12 as being captured at Corin Dam on February 22, 1971, was found drowned in a net there on February 24, 1972, by Mr L. Schulz of the Dept of the Interior.

The longest movement for this species is now of a nestling banded on Prohibited Island, Narrung S.A., on March 7, 1971 and recovered at Mannering Park Bay near Newcastle, N.S.W., 720 miles to the east-northeast.

### C.O.G. ACTIVITIES

Mr Henry Nix, Senior Research Scientist with the CSIRO Division of Land Research, spoke on "Bird Distribution and Habitat in the Australian Region". The following is an extended summary of this important and thought-provoking lecture.

The possible origins of the Australian bird fauna were discussed in terms of current theories of plate tectonics and continental drift. Estimated dates of continental rifting and subsequent drifting relative to the time of evolution of avian orders and families prompts a reconsideration of the conventional theories of colonisation from the north. Fluctuations in climate and sea-level during the past 30,000 years were briefly discussed in terms of their influence on speciation.

Present bird distribution patterns were shown to be broadly related to major structural formations of vegetation, which in turn are closely related to seasonal water regimes. Attention was directed to the new structural classification of vegetation devised by Prof. R.L. Specht in collaboration with other plant ecologists (Australian Environment, 4th ed). In the past, the confused state of vegetation classification in Australia has left a legacy of inadequate and misleading habitat descriptions in the ornithological literature.

cont/-

The distribution of a given bird species was discussed in terms of its occupation (i.e. foraging behaviour) and address (i.e. habitat) relative to its energy balance. The significance of the various terms in the energy balance for adaptation to specific environmental conditions was considered. The productivity of the habitat will determine the foraging time needed to maintain the longer-term energy balance of the individual and the population. The hypothesis was advanced that light intensity plays a direct and dominant role in determining effective foraging time and hence bird distribution. (The argument applies equally to many other life forms).

It was postulated that a given plumage pattern and foraging technique operates most efficiently within a defined zone of light intensity or light window (efficiently in terms of seeking prey and avoiding predators). The importance of this hypothesis for habitat selection, migration, diurnal foraging behaviour, plumage patterns, bird species diversity in the tropical versus the temperate zones and time of breeding were discussed at length. The serial replacement of congeneric species over the entire spectrum of light conditions was illustrated, using the genera Petroica, Rhipidura and Acanthiza.



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March 8

Dr Richard Biedelman's talk about Colorado hit us with the warmth and velocity of the Chinook wind that occasionally sweeps across his home state. During a very enjoyable evening we were taken on a whirlwind tour, via colour slides, of this Rocky Mountain State which is diversified into zones ranging from semi-arid to alpine. It enjoys (or endures) a variety of climates equivalent to a horizontal traverse from the Mexican desert to Greenland. The ruggedness of the country has hindered transportation and settlement, so that Colorado's 104,000-odd square miles are still relatively well--endowed with wildlife. It harbours pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep and mountain lion - three mammals whose ranges in other states have shrunk alarmingly. The State is being invaded from the east by species, such as the blue jay and opossum, which travel westward along watercourses. It also gets invaded from the south by hordes of Texan tourists.

March 12

The 30 or so members who attended the outing to the eastern side of Black Mountain enjoyed a very pleasant morning. After a slow start, the day picked up when several feeding flocks were found. Excellent views were had of Grey Fantails, White-throated Treecreeper, a female Flame Robin and several male Scarlet Robins. The day's highlight was a male Red-capped Robin, a rare but lately fairly frequent visitor to the A.C.T. Altogether a total of 27 bird species was recorded. Another interesting diversion during the morning was the sighting of several Grey Kangaroos feeding at close range.

COMING MEETINGS

April 12

Mr J. Forshaw will give an illustrated talk on "Bird watching in South America". Birds of the month will be the marsh terns, by Dr P. Fullagar.

April, 22-23

A weekend outing to Lake Cowal, N.S.W. is being organised. This large lake is situated about 50 miles northwest of Grenfell, and it is an important nesting ground for ibis, cormorants and darters. Further details about the trip can be obtained from Mark Clayton, 23 Nardoo Cres., O'Connor, A.C.T. 2601 (Tel ah. 489737).

Major H.L. Bell will speak on "A Field Expedition to Mount Bosavi, New Guinea". Bird of the Month will be the Little and Red-chested Quail, by Mark Clayton,

May 14

Outing to Blundell's Creek, A.C.T. Details from Mark Clayton.

June 14

Annual General Meeting and Member's Night.

All indoor meetings are held at the CSIRO Lecture Theatre, Black Mountain, commencing at 8 p.m. Tea and biscuits afterwards.

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SHORT OBSERVATIONS

SPARROWHAWK Accipiter cirrocephalus. A pair has taken up residence at Gungahlin, A.C.T. since early March, 1972 (A. D'Andria). One at Mugga Lane, A.C.T., on 9/1/72 (J. McNaughton).

SEA EAGLE Haliaeetus leucogaster A pair at the south end of Lake George on 25/1/72 (S. Wilson).

LITTLE FALCON Falco longipennis One seen daily at Narrabundah from 10/1 to 9/2/72 (SW).

COMMON SANDPIPER Tringa hypoleuca. One was watched in flight and feeding at the Molonglo River entrance, Lake Burley Griffin (SW).

REDNECKED STINT Calidris ruficollis. One was photographed with Sharptailed Sandpipers at Dairy Flat Road, Fyshwick, on 17/10/71 (JM). Identification was confirmed by Fred T. Smith of the Bird Observers Club, Melbourne.

BRUSH CUCKOO Cacomantis variolosus. One at the Deakin Tip on 12/1/72 (D. Wilson).

HOODED ROBIN Petroica cucullata. A male, female and one juvenile at Mugga Lane on 9/1/72 (JM).

INDIAN MYNA Acridotheres tristis. A pair nested in a hole in a gum tree at Hughes from 17/11/71 to 30/11/71. The outcome is not known.

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