



# Canberra Bird Notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 4 Number 1 January 1978

## EDITORIAL

Volume 3 No. 2 of Canberra Bird Notes was my first as Editor. Volume 4 No. 1 completes my twelve issues as Editor and only Tony D'Andria has exceeded that total; he was responsible for fourteen issues.

The Editor's chief worry is in obtaining sufficient suitable material for publication. We usually publish 24 pages but at times we have been down to 16. During my term every issue has had at least 24 pages, two have had 28 pages and there was one of 32. So, material has been available, for which my sincere thanks.

When asked before the annual meeting if I would stand again as Editor my reply was that I would while material for publication continued to arrive.

For this issue I approached many members as usual, giving 1 November as the closing date; on that date I had nothing to publish! Many personal interviews and some twenty telephone calls later we have another issue despite the non-arrival of some promised material. Much of this is topical and so must go in this issue; so another 28-page issue is the result. Nevertheless there is little in the 'in' tray for the April issue.

Please co-operate in producing material - it is not beyond the powers of any member. I think the above message is sufficiently obvious!

## IDENTIFYING SEA-BIRDS: I. ALL-DARK SHEARWATERS

*John Penhallurick*

You are sitting on Burrewarra Point with an experienced observer of sea-birds. He directs your attention to what is little more than a black dot moving north 2 kilometres out, which cannot be seen at all with the naked eye, and announces that it is a wedge-tailed shearwater. How can he tell?

Identifying sea-birds from the shore is a very different matter from identifying land-birds. The bird is usually at a considerable distance - anything up to 3.5 kilometres, which is nearing the limit of recognition. Shore watching is also different from watching from a boat. In a boat, you can hope to see birds at fairly close range. But from the shore, almost all true sea-birds that you see will be 400 metres or more from you. And while it is necessary to be familiar with such features as bill length and colour, and whether the feet protrude beyond the tail or not, the bird will usually be too far away for these aspects to be seen.

There are virtually no bright colours among sea-birds. Basically the birds are white, dark brown, grey, black or some combination of these. It is absolutely necessary to know what the bird looks like. Even this is not always available for identification. Dull light or glare on the water may make it hard even to distinguish light from dark. Yet even in these conditions, one can sometimes make an identification on the basis of other clues - size, shape, behaviour, the way the wings are held, and the pattern of flight.

In this and following articles some points useful for identification will be mentioned. However, these are not meant to be a complete guide - a much fuller account can be found in the standard handbooks: Slater (1970), and Serventy, Serventy and Warham (1971). The best way to become familiar with the birds is to watch with an experienced observer.

Two birds seen in large numbers off south-eastern Australia in spring, summer and early autumn are the Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris* and the Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*. These are similar in size - about 43 centimetres - and both look all-dark at sea. The best way of telling the two apart

is by the wings. In the Short-tailed, the wings are slightly backswept, but in the Wedge-tailed the wrists are held well forward. The wing is also noticeably broader than that of the Short-tailed.

The two species also differ significantly in their flight; that of the Short-tailed is generally more direct, faster and closer to the water; Short-tailed Shearwaters consistently overtake the slower Wedge-tailed birds. When flying into the wind, *pacificus* almost shoulders its way forward, swinging from one side to the other. With the wind behind it, it swings up high above the water.

As Peter Fullagar notes in Slater, the wedge-shaped tail is not a reliable guide to identification in flight. The bird usually fans it out only when banking sharply. Less common all-dark shearwaters that may be confused with the above are the Sooty *Puffinus griseus* and Fleshy-footed *Puffinus carneipes*. The Sooty flies and holds its wings like the Short-tailed, is somewhat bulkier in the body, but this is not easily picked up; nor is the longer bill. The criterion usually mentioned is the white wing linings. But here, too, care must be exercised: many Short-tailed Shearwaters also show a rather pale underwing.

The Fleshy-footed Shearwater flies with narrow wings held straight out. It is larger and bulkier again, but may be hard to distinguish unless the bird is close enough for the pale colour of the bill and feet to be visible.

Finally, there is one all-dark petrel that may be seen from the shore, and which may be confused with the all-dark shearwaters. (There are other dark petrels, but these are most unlikely to be seen inshore.) This is the Great-winged Petrel *Pterodroma macroptera*. If close enough, it can be picked by the short *pterodroma* bill with prominent nostrils. Though about the same length as a Short-tailed Shearwater, its thicker body gives it a stubby appearance. Its flight pattern also separates it. The bird flies with strong and frequent wing-beats, in contrast to the flap and glide of the shearwaters. I have also found that the underwing tends to appear in flight as having a lighter, or shinier, inner lining, surrounded by a darker or duller perimeter.

#### References

D.L. Serventy, Vincent Serventy & John Warham, *The handbook of Australian sea-birds*, A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd, Sydney, 1971.

Peter Slater, *A field guide to Australian birds: non-passerines*, Rigby Ltd, Adelaide, 1970.

J. Penhallurick, 86 Bingley Crescent, Eraser, A.C.T. 2615.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### NEOPHEMA PARROTS

'Bird of the month' for November was presented by Joe Forshaw, who spoke on identification of Neophema parrots. Field identification of neophemas can be very difficult, especially when wandering individuals are observed, and caution should be exercised. The difficulties are significantly exacerbated if the birds are juveniles. The neophemas fall into three plumage groups: (1) Bourke's Parrot (brown); (2) the 'olive' species; and (3) the 'bright green' species.

- (1) Bourke's Parrot is easily identified.
- (2) The 'olive' species present the most difficulty and juveniles can often be distinguished only in the hand. The three species are:
  - (a) Elegant Parrot *N. elegant*: pale blue restricted to flight feathers and primary coverts; frontal band deep blue, bordered above by pale blue line extending above and beyond eyes.
  - (b) Blue-winged Parrot *N. chrysostoma*: deep blue on flight feathers and all upper wing-coverts; frontal band extending to, but not beyond, eyes. Occurs in our district as a non-breeding migrant.
  - (c) Rock Parrot *N. petrophila*: generally very dull olive, with blue around eyes and on lores.
- (3) The 'bright green' species, of which there are three:
  - (a) Orange-bellied Parrot *N. chrysogaster*: upper parts bright grass green; underparts rich yellow with orange belly; rich blue frontal band; has distinctive alarm call.
  - (a) Turquoise Parrot *N. pulchella*: male distinctive, female similar to female of *N. splendida* but has darker blue on wing-coverts and conspicuous cream-white lores. Occurs in our area.
  - (b) Scarlet-chested Parrot *N. splendida*: male distinctive; female similar to female *N. pulchella* but has paler blue on wing-coverts and pale blue lores.

FIELD OUTING - GREEN CAPE OCTOBER LONG WEEKEND 1977

*Peter Fullagar*

Twenty-one members camped at Bittangabee in the Ben Boyd National Park on Green Cape, N.S.W., over the long weekend 1 to 3 October 1977.

Most of the time was spent in sea watching from the headland near the lighthouse, at the tip of the cape.

On the Saturday, in the early afternoon, the movement south of Short-tailed Shearwaters was at a rate of about 500 birds per minute, dropping to about 150 per minute towards dusk. At 1600 hours a large feeding flock of several thousands of shearwaters was accumulating on the sea directly out from the cape at about 12 kilometres distance. At 1700 hours an adult White-breasted Sea-eagle was seen to go out to the shearwater feeding flock, at that time about 8 kilometres off the cape, but it returned without a kill after several attempts at catching Short-tails. This afternoon was also notable for the movement south of Australian Gannets (adult to immature at a ratio of about 2:1). Four species of albatross, Wandering, White-capped (Shy), Yellow-nosed and Black-browed, were observed and all those present began to recognise the field characteristics by the end of the afternoon. A few Fluttering Shearwaters were seen and some Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were moving closer inshore amongst the Short-tailed passage birds. Crested Terns were mostly seen going south and Silver Gulls and Black Cormorants were assumed to be part of the local movements of birds up and down the coast. During the afternoon four Arctic Skuas were spotted moving south with the general passage of birds.

During Sunday 2 October the movement of Short-tails was much more impressive, with figures like 800 per minute in the early morning, rising to 1500 per minute by mid afternoon as the wind rose and heavy rain set in. Additional birds scored today which were of particular interest were several Giant Petrels and another Arctic Skua. During the mid morning those sea watching had the excitement of seeing at least two Killer Whales off the cape, whilst the remainder of the party were pushing through the heathlands for Ground Parrots and

were very lucky to stumble upon a brood of recently fledged young with three young already out of the nest and the fourth still in it.

Early morning on 3 October produced very little in the way of sea-bird movements. Hardly any shearwaters were to be seen, but as the morning progressed the passage was obvious, but at a low level of about thirty per minute going south. By mid afternoon the passage had increased to about 200 per minute.

Two other interesting birds were noted. One was a Singing Honeyeater that kept us company at the Cape and for those who refrained from dashing off back to Canberra early on Monday afternoon an immature Square-tailed Kite came into the camping area at Bittangabee!

The following birds were recorded:

Little Penguin	Crimson Rosella
Wandering Albatross	Ground Parrot
Black-browed Albatross	Fan-tailed Cuckoo
White-capped (Shy) Albatross	Rufous-tailed Bronze-cuckoo
Yellow-nosed Albatross	Boobook Owl
Southern Giant Petrel	Kookaburra
Wedge-tailed Shearwater	Welcome Swallow
Short-tailed Shearwater	Richard's Pipit
Fluttering Shearwater	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Australian Gannet	Common Blackbird
Black Cormorant	Spotted Quail-thrush
Little Black Cormorant	Superb Blue Wren
Little Pied Cormorant	Southern Emu-wren
White-faced Heron	Striated Thornbill
Square-tailed Kite	Brown Thornbill
Little Eagle	White-browed Scrub-wren
White-breasted Sea-eagle	Striated Field-wren
Brown Falcon	Brown Flycatcher
Pied Oystercatcher	Scarlet Robin
Spur-winged Plover	Rose Robin
Bar-tailed Godwit	Eastern Yellow Robin
Arctic Skua Silver	Grey Fantail
Gull Crested Tern	Willie Wagtail
Brush Bronzewing	Golden Whistler
Wonga Pigeon	Rufous Whistler
Rainbow Lorikeet	Grey Shrike-thrush
Glossy Black Cockatoo	Eastern Whipbird
	White-throated Treecreeper



Eastern Silveryeye	Tawny-crowned Honeyeater
Lewin Honeyeater	Eastern Spinebill
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Little Wattlebird
Singing Honeyeater	Red Wattlebird
Noisy Friarbird	Satin Bowerbird
Crescent Honeyeater	Dusky Woodswallow
New Holland Honeyeater	Pied Currawong
White-cheeked Honeyeater	Australian Raven

*Dr Peter Fullagar, 5 Darcy Place, Chifley, A.C.T. 2606.*

#### THE RING-NECKED PHEASANT

*Rod Anderson*

The lower south-western slope of Mt Ainslie is the location of a recent sighting of the Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*. Mr Dennis Brown advised me of seeing a brightly plumaged pheasant during the morning of 24 September 1977 immediately behind the Ainslie Hostel. A check of my available literature failed to reveal any local records, so a note was taken of the field characteristics of the Ring-necked Pheasant, as I considered this the most likely species to be encountered.

We both returned to the area and at 1400 hours, after a brief search, I heard a loud double-noted cry. The pheasant appeared a short distance off, walking through the lightly timbered vegetation. Good views were had of the bird using a pair of 8 x 21 binoculars; the shining dark green head, red facial skin and white collar, together with the brown marbled back and long tail, made positive identification of the male Ring-necked Pheasant.

*R. Anderson, J106 Kanangra Court, Reid, A.C.T. 2601.*



## C.O.G. EXCURSION

*Neil Hermes*

Seven members of C.O.G. attended an excursion to Burrinjuck Dam on 13 November. The areas found to be most productive for birds were the dry sclerophyll forest surrounding Burrinjuck Village and the farmland-forest interface at the top of the range. In these areas many migratory species were seen, e.g. Sacred-Kingfisher, White-winged Triller, White-throated Warbler. Within the village itself Crimson Rosellas and Pied Currawongs were common. Very few water birds were observed.

An interesting observation was that of a dead Pied Currawong hanging from a nest by what appeared to be fishing line. The bird was large and the nest full of fishing line, leading us to conclude that the bird was an adult which had been lining the nest with the line when it had become entangled.

Access to Burrinjuck Village is from the Hume Highway between Bowning and Jugiong. The dam can also be reached from Yass and Wee Jasper.

### *SPECIES LIST*

Black Cormorant; White-faced Heron; Gang-gang Cockatoo; Sulphur-crested Cockatoo; King Parrot; Crimson Rosella; Fantailed Cuckoo; Kookaburra; Sacred Kingfisher; Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike; White-winged Triller; Scarlet Robin; Eastern Yellow Robin; Grey Shrike-thrush; Grey Fantail; Willie Wagtail; Superb Blue Wren; White-browed Scrub-wren; White-throated Warbler; Yellow-rumped Thornbill; Varied Sittella; White-throated Treecreeper; Red Wattlebird; Yellow-faced Honeyeater; Spotted Pardalote; Silvereye; House Sparrow, White-winged Chough; Australian Magpie Lark; Dusky Woodswallow; Australian Magpie; Pied Currawong; Australian Raven.

*N. Hermes, Oaklands, Spring Range, via Hall, N.S.W.*

## SPRING SONG

*P. Morris Kennedy*

The English Blackbird *Turdus merula* is a welcome garden resident with endearing habits and, in the case of the male, a beautiful song. A pair has nested in our garden now for five years, and obviously feels very much at home. They live peacefully alongside other species, although the male will drive off other male blackbirds who trespass on his territory, and both male and female object to sparrow spectators during bathing sessions! They are very fond of the rather untidy shrubbery, where they spend many happy hours turning over fallen leaves in search of food - and disposing of our unwanted insect pests at the same time. Another particular attraction is the constant supply of clean water, used for bathing and drinking. Bathing habits vary markedly. 'Mother' has a thorough, but reasonably sedate, bath, then spends as much as twenty minutes preening on a nearby trellis; 'father' has a quicker, no nonsense dip followed by a brief brush-up in a convenient tree; last year's 'daughter' indulged in very long vigorous splashing sessions, flying off immediately after looking like a damp shaggy mop - hopefully she later learnt proper preening procedure!

At present (early August) the blackbird's song is the first sound I hear on waking - a welcome sign that spring is really on the way.

*P. Morris Kennedy, P.O. Box 29, Watson, A.C.T.*

\*\*\*\*\*

## SUBURBAN PARROTS

*Steve Wilson*

This winter of 1977 White Cockatoos, Gang-gang Cockatoos, Galahs and Eastern Rosellas have been seen daily at Narrabundah, mostly in quite large numbers. White Cockatoos were last seen on 26 October, Galahs on the same day but reappeared on 12 November, while the Gang-gangs were last noted on 21 October. Eastern Rosellas were last seen on 20 October. It would appear that these four parrots left for breeding territories. The answer appears to be that the trees in the Narrabundah area do not yet provide breeding holes for these species.

## SCIENTIFIC COLLECTING - GOOD OR BAD?

*Richard Schodde*

I am grateful for the opportunity of responding to Merle Baldwin's observations about scientific collecting because it gives me the chance to dispel misconceptions and unwarranted fears about the effect of collecting on natural populations.

1. Let me emphasise that I am only talking about collecting for taxonomic purposes.

2. The figures I gave for specimens needed from a 1500 square mile block - that is, about 30-50 specimens - would be the maximum required from that block. Collections of equivalent numbers of each species are not needed for each Australian museum because taxonomic research in these institutions is carried out by loaning relevant collections between them, rather than by field collecting. On that basis, if I may quote Mrs Baldwin's own words, my estimate of collections required 'appears to be acceptable'. For large birds, such as the Wedge-tailed Eagle, the numbers needed are obviously rather fewer.

3. Mrs Baldwin suggests that my figures for population surpluses in Song Sparrows are not entirely applicable to the local scene. Judge, however, from figures presented for the Willie Wagtail by J.D. Macdonald at a recent RAOU Congress. Using my formula and the data from Stephen Marchant's nest record scheme, he showed that surpluses in the Willie Wagtail were even greater than in the Song Sparrow. It is worth remembering here too that Australian passerines as a rule live longer than their counterparts in Europe and North America and therefore have the potential for raising more young. This has been proved from banding records.

4. Mrs Baldwin goes on to say that Grey Shrike-thrushes and various robins are now limited to about one pair to each 10 square miles, and so on for other species. If she infers by this that here is a fixed, static population of bird species pared to the minimum, she simply hasn't thought the matter through.

In the first place, bird populations, even local and territorial ones, are only very rarely permanently fixed. May I quote a classical example given by Norman Favaloro at a Bird Banders meeting in 1961.

It concerned the Nankeen Kestrel, a single bird of which he regularly observed perched on a particular telephone pole on a particular road near Mildura; it was the only one for several miles around. One day he trapped and banded it and then, coming along the road a week or so later, saw it there again and set his snares for a retrap. The bird he trapped was unbanded. Over the following three or four months, Favalaro banded over twenty kestrels from that one pole. Of course, this is an extreme example because foraging kestrels are obviously much more nomadic than say territorial fairy wrens. But two points nevertheless remain. First, birds are obviously often more mobile than we realise. Second, it is misleading, even unrealistic, to maintain, without marked birds, that there is only one pair of Grey Shrike-thrushes to each 10 square miles etc.

In the second, more important, place, those single pairs that Mrs Baldwin talks about to each 10 square miles etc. presumably breed. What happens to the fledged young, whether they be more in good years or fewer in poor? If each 10 square mile territory can hold no more than a parental pair, the young must disperse to find vacated territories or perish. There is no 'vacant land' for them to go to, at least not for members of a long-established bird fauna. Whatever the circumstances, whether they are produced not this year but the next, surplus progeny from neighbouring territories will always be available to fill those depleted by collecting. That is, unless there is a total catastrophe, in which all habitat is devastated. In that case none of the Shrike-thrushes, Robins etc. would be able to survive anyway. These circumstances apply just as much, if not more so, to sparsely distributed birds on the fringes of their range (e.g. the Crested Bell-bird at Inverell) as they do to species that are relatively more abundant at the centre of their range.

5. In my own experience, no skin is ever allowed to be lost, damaged or destroyed in the making of collections. I can't vouch for collectors of the past, but those practising collecting now in Australia are well aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

6. Mrs Baldwin's suggestion that population counts be made prior to collecting, presumably to establish what numbers can be sampled, has merit.

7. That old chestnut, that colour photographs of live birds can replace the taking of specimens for taxonomic studies, ought to be laid to rest once and for all. It is

impractical, we know from experience, for two basic reasons. First, colour tone cannot be standardised from photograph to photograph due to vagaries of exposure, background, light and film type; moreover the dyes fade, almost certainly more rapidly than pigments do in birds. Second, on-the-spot photography, as it would have to be, can only record known characters, i.e. those it was laid down to record. It cannot discover new characters and herein lies its chief fault. For example, the most potent character so far known to reveal the close relationship between two genera of New Guinean tit-berry peckers *Oreocharis*, *Paramythia* is fine black filoplumes hidden in deep yellow body feathering. These are normally invisible and photographs of them according to a standard form would never find them, at least not at all consistently. So fundamental evidence of relationships would be 'lost'.

8. As for taxonomy playing a 'relatively small part' in biological science, we might do well to remind ourselves that taxonomy is father to all other biological disciplines. Man began to study the living world about him by observing, describing and classifying it into a manageable order. These fundamental techniques have not, nor will they ever, stop.

Today, taxonomy is concerned more than ever with learning the relationships between all organisms in space and time. As such, it lies at the centre of the biological sciences, gathering in data from all disciplines to better our understanding of relationships. Until this is complete, we will not know how the living world fits together, with the result that the best use of its parts and resources will continue to elude us.

*Dr R. Schodde, 30 Bamford Street, Hughes, A.C.T. 2605.*

\*\*\*\*\*

#### SWANS BREEDING

*Doug Ross*

I saw a swan with four cygnets, on 20 August 1977, on the big pond by the farm on Dairy Flat Road. The cygnets, c. 30-35 cm in length at water line, were in 'nestling' coloured plumage. Obviously they would not have flown in: the question is, where did they walk from (if, in fact, the nest was not in the reed beds in the pond itself) but, as to that, I can't say I've seen a swan or swans on the pond during the nest-building, incubation and breeding period.

SCEPTICS ALL

Doug Ross

SJW Order. The Canberra bird recognition committee is now in session. Gentlemen, remember our motto - Doubting Thomas was a sucker for a soft story. Any candidates? You there.

1st applicant Sir, I've seen some sparrows in my backyard.

SJW What's that? Sparrows? Are you sure they were sparrows? Lots of other birds can look like sparrows, you know. (Aside) When I first started, you weren't allowed to report seeing a backyard, even, for the first five years, let alone birds in it.

1st applicant Sir, they were sparrows. I checked with Cayley and Frith and Slater and the rest - and here's a deadie to prove it.

SJW All right, don't cry. But they'll have to be house sparrows. None of your airy fairy hedge nonsense. Next?

2nd applicant Sir, plumed egrets ...

SJW Bosh, you've got 'em mixed up with white egrets. Why, even I have difficulty in the field. Now if you can assure me you did a bird-in-the-hand comparison ...

2nd applicant I'm not going to get my fingers nipped just to satisfy you, you sceptic ...

*(Sensation. SJW topples from chair and is rushed off to physio. Later that night, mysterious lights are seen at Gungahlin.)*

INTERLUDE

2nd applicant Please, Lord, a sign.

Lord Francis, Francis! Where has that friar got to? FRANCIS!!

Michael I saw him ducking off to purgatory a bit back.

Lord FRANCIS!

Francis Lord Sorry, Lord, I was having another shot at persuading ...

Lord I know, the man whose legs were bitten by the wolf of Gubbio to forgive the brute.

Francis Well, Lord, you know, until he does forgive, he can't come up here. Trouble is, he's got a thing about wolves. Lupine terror, I think they call it, though I'm not very good with scholastic terms.

Michael He means lycophobia, Lord, I think, and I'd have it, too, if a wolf had bitten my legs. If I'd any legs to bite, that is.

Francis Lycophobia? I can't bear the word. But, Lord, it gives me an idea.

Lord Yes, Francis

Francis If I, here, can't stand a word, perhaps that man's thing about wolves shouldn't stand in his way.

Lord (aside) 700 years to come up with a plea of diminished responsibility! A good Bronx lawyer would have got on to it in ten minutes flat. These Romantics.

Francis yes Lord

Lord All right, we'll show clemency. And talking of clemency, I've had a plea to my All-Mercifulness, the sort I can't reject. Can you, as patron saint of birds, arrange for a plumed egret and a white egret to appear side by side at a certain place and time?

Francis Egrets. Lovely white creatures, soaring into the empyrean like souls.

Lord Things have got a bit more methodical since your day, Francis. A plumed egret and a white egret, if you please, and leave the poetry out of it.

Michael The Lord means Egretta intermedia and Egretta alba, in that order.

Francis All this is a bit too much for me. I said I wasn't scholastically minded. Can I take Ray or Linnaeus along as technical adviser?

Lord Do what the - the heaven you please, but do get a move on.

.....

SJW The meeting is reconvened and, yes, my back is very much better. Now, where's that plumed egret fanatic?

2nd applicant Sir, it was a plumed egret.

SJW You'll have to do better than that with me.

2nd applicant Right, buster, get your teeth into this.

First - not a little egret: it had a yellow, not a black, bill (or are you calling G.V.T. a liar?). Second - not a cattle egret: not dumpy; feeding on water, not on land; and not covered with ochre paint like the cattle egrets that were there, not 50 metres away, across the creek. Third - not a white egret: there was one of those by my bird, towering over it, and my bird's wing span in flight was nothing like as broad as a white egret's. Fourth - my bird's legs were definitely shorter, and so was its bill, and unless I'm imagining, the shape of its skull was rather different. Altogether, mine was a much lighter bird. Fifth - I got within 10 metres of two of my birds, situated on the lake wall, and if they were whites then there's a new dwarf strain of *Egretta alba* to report.

SJW  
2nd applicant

Face - and bill?  
I give you that. Birds in the hand etc. (though I'm still not going to get my fingers nipped). Both the white and the plumed had non-breeding bills and faces, though both were obviously in breeding feather. And my bird had plumes on the breast - which nobody allows the white.

SJW (heavily)

OK, I'll buy it this time - but don't let it happen again.

*POSTLUDE*

2nd applicant  
Francis

Thanks, Lord.  
?!\*

These Plumed Egret sightings are seriously intended but it being the festive season they are presented in pantomime above. Details:

Plumed Egret - Jerrabomberra Creek  
9 November one    13 November    two  
November one    14 November    three  
November one    15 November    two  
November one    15 November    (p.m.) one

*A.D. Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.*



The publication of this book ten years after the first publication of Robin Hill's book *Australian birds* provides an opportunity to review the present bird book situation in Australia. Before Robin Hill's book there were only two works generally available to the amateur ornithologist, that is Cayley's *What bird is that?* and Leach's *An Australian bird book*. These days we have a field guide (with hopefully another on the way), a handbook, several books which profess to be all about Australian birds and a plethora of picture books, monographs and regional guides as well as Ian Rowley's excellent *Bird life*. The questions therefore must be where does the Reader's Digest book fit into the picture, how accurate is it and is it value for money.

Before answering those questions it is probably time to mention briefly the debt that bird Watching in Australia owes to Robin Hill. He demonstrated the existence of a market for bird books in Australia by persuading a publisher to produce a book which was successful and at the same time increased the market for later bird books by producing a colourful, easy-to-read book that interested and involved many more people in bird watching. In fact many present-day bird watchers owe their start in this field to his book and many people participating in the RAOU Atlas scheme still quote Hill as their main or secondary reference book. Admittedly the book had its errors, which were pointed out by the majority of reviews at that time, but we can now in hindsight see the important impact it had on bird watchers.

The first question posed above was where does the Reader's Digest book fit into the bird book picture? The answer to this must be as a worthy replacement for Robin Hill; that is, mainly as a book to popularise bird watching. However it also has an extremely important secondary role which is as a handbook for those who want to know a bit more about each bird in particular and birds in general after they have learnt to identify the species. One thing to note is that it is not a field guide. It is too bulky to use in the field, the text does not point out important field identification points for various birds, and the pictures do not always show the best

identification features and seem to have been selected without too much reference to the text. Nevertheless as a general book about Australian birds it is by far the best on the market and has completely superseded Robin Hill.

The second question posed was how accurate is it? The answer must be that it is far better than any equivalent book. The amount of valuable information in it, much of it not previously published, far outweighs the minor errors, most of which will be corrected in the second edition. The only real criticism this reviewer had in general was the standard of colour reproduction. This varied considerably in the reviewer's copy, and taken together with the choice of some plates tended to make the pictorial part of the book of a lower standard than the text. However the colour aberrations would not worry the reader with only a general knowledge of birds.

The third question posed was is it value for money? The answer to this must be yes. When Robin Hill was published ten years ago it cost \$16.00. This book, which is far better in content, costs less than \$30.00 if purchased by post from the Reader's Digest. Considering the movement in money values over the past ten years the answer is immediately obvious.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the book is accurate (apart from some quibbles about colour reproduction) and good value for money. It is ideal for the person who has only a general or gradually awakening interest in birds. It is also ideal for somebody who is very interested in birds, already has a good field guide and wants to increase their knowledge of birds in general. If however the objective is to learn to identify birds one would be better off spending money on a good field guide before purchasing this book. Then when identification problems are mastered buy this book to increase general knowledge, especially by reading the two short sections on '*Land of birds*' and '*The life of birds*' which provide general information on the place of birds in Australia.

#### THE SECOND EDITION

C.I.

Although the title suggests it might be complete we all know that no book on birds is ever complete or absolutely definitive. The Reader's Digest and their contributors had a good bash at it in their first edition and their book has been widely acclaimed albeit with some

side nit-picking. I understand that there was a budget limit on the next edition; be that as it may, the Reader's Digest should be congratulated on trying to upgrade their book with new information and photographs. Far too often standard texts are reprinted ad nauseam with no textual alterations despite there being substantial new information available. Besides the Reader's Digest book, the only other standard text that I can recall which is regularly revised is Serventy & Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia*. This, however, is probably due to the tenacity of Dom. Serventy.

All this brings me to your editor's request, which was a run-down on the changes in the Reader's Digest book. The heath zone in the vegetation map is now a distinctive maroon and the saltbush and dry grassland illustrations have been changed. The White-chinned Petrel photo has been blown up and one can see the bird more clearly. The Sooty Shearwater map has been expanded from what was a map of breeding distribution to its normal pelagic range. Buller's Shearwater makes an appearance with quite a nice photo. The map for the Black-bellied Storm Petrel indicates that this species is no longer a Tasmanian endemic. There is now a map for the White-faced storm Petrel but it is more in accord with breeding distribution than the normal range of the species, which is what the maps are supposed to represent; however, some contain records of vagrants, e.g. Common Diving Petrel, while others do not, e.g. Flesh-footed Shearwater. It is so difficult to be consistent; perhaps John McKean's suggestion of different toning for birds outside their normal range should be taken up as it would get over this problem. Maybe the RAOU Atlas scheme will be able to show the way by the time the next edition appears. The picture of the half-alive beached Diving Petrel has been replaced by a bird taken on its breeding grounds. New photographs also appear for the Little Pied Cormorant, Blue-winged Shoveller, Noisy Scrub-bird, Jacky Winter, Western Whipbird, Brown Songlark, Tasmanian Thornbill, Striated Thornbill and White-eared Honeyeater. In the case of the last there is still room for improvement.

The Cattle Egret's range has been expanded and this will obviously be a continuing development. For the next edition perhaps the recent documentation of the Pied Heron as a breeding species in N.E. Qld can be taken into account. The Little Egret range is extended in S.E. Aust., while the Reef Heron and Osprey are omitted from Tasmania. The Black-breasted Buzzard has a new portrait, but note the

nest is full of Nankeen Kestrels. For the full story see Jack Cupper, *Aust. Bird Watcher* 7:3, 69-73. Tasmania, where the Whistling Kite is only a vagrant, is excluded from its range.

We note no new photo was made for the Red Goshawk. A real challenge for the Cuppers and David Hollands. Map modifications of a minor nature occur for the Painted Quail, Plumed Egret, Painted Snipe, Southern Stone Curlew, Whiskered Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Crimson Rosella, Orange-bellied Parrot, Oriental Cuckoo, Fairy Martin, Ground Cuckoo Shrike, Willie Wagtail, Western Warbler, Black Currawong. The Marsh Sandpiper has Tasmania removed from its range, no doubt due to its vagrant habits there, while the Chinese Snipe now has a distribution map. The Pectoral Sandpiper has a distribution map for the first time, but it points to where the most active collectors and observers have operated and probably does not indicate its real distribution. The telephoto shot of the Australian Pratincole is replaced by a better picture with more detail. The distribution of the Silver Gull has been expanded to cover its inland range as it is quite apparent that you can never tell where it is going to appear next.

The order of the Pigeons has been changed so the Rock Pigeons do not split the Partridge Pigeon assemblage and *Petrophassa* has been restricted to the Rock Pigeons and not applied as well to the Plumed Pigeon, which seemed ridiculous on current literature!

The photos of the White-tailed and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos are expanded, while the Little Corella has lost a full page photo of a mob of white blobs - I like the photo but don't regret its loss if we get more text or new photos of species. Unfortunately, the Superb Parrot is still sitting in a 'tree', unwisely pruned, and a species that does not form part of its natural habitat and is thus an eyesore when contrasted to the wild portraits of Regent Parrots opposite. I know there are problems finding good photographs but I think studio shots as applied ad nauseam with several groups show a bias that should be corrected whenever possible. The Hooded Parrot and Golden-shouldered Parrot are now placed close together so that these closely related forms (?species) can at least be compared. Some of the parrots of the *Neophema* genus photowise are given more prominence. It all seems a matter of give and take, which is fine if done wisely, but maybe in the next edition an extra few pages could be added to cope with the extra information and photographs which; will be available by

then.

Now after working half way through the book it is obvious that an attempt has been made to correct some of the few wrong tones caused in reproduction in the first edition. The range of the Fork-tailed Swift has been altered to cover practically all Australia as it is difficult to distinguish its normal 'wintering' range from the areas it rarely visits. Perhaps if there were some observers in the virtually uninhabited areas of Tasmania this too could be blocked in. It is good to see the Fairy Martin photo in correct aspect; the first edition view was obviously not checked by an ornithologist. Richard's, our one and only Pipit, has a new portrait which is just slightly better, while the Lemon-breasted Flycatcher's photo is very much an improvement. A Buff-sided Robin photograph is used to replace the White-browed Robin photograph. It would have been good if they could have used photos of both races, though one has to admit the Buff-sided is the better of the two. A species not previously illustrated is the Bower Shrike Thrush, the photographer being Jack Purnell.

I am disappointed to say that the Chiming Wedgebill is still wearing its lovely blue breast, which, of course, it doesn't possess. The female Cinnamon Quail Thrush has been supplanted by a mere male(!), which probably means Ros Eskill had no say in this revision. The Pilotbird has been shifted out of the middle of the Bristlebirds and placed just behind them. We have a new Weebill photo and it's obviously a northern form and much sharper than the previous photo of a southern bird.

The replacement Red-browed Tree-creeper photo is a decided improvement on the previous one. The Silver-crowned Friarbird in the Xanthosternon is also very much better than the blurred bird in the Grevillea. The toning fault in the Bell Miner has been corrected. The best part of all the photo replacing is that the White-lined Honeyeater is a genuine White-lined Honeyeater, not a Brown Honeyeater, which was slipped in at the last moment in the previous edition without one vetter seeing it. The White-naped Honeyeater has a new photo which colourwise is OK but the bird must have been nesting in a dead Eucalypt if leaf colour can be relied on. The Black-headed Honeyeater has a new portrait, as also has the Silvereye.

The Firetail name mix-up has, of course, been fixed up, but we still have too many studio shots in the finch section. The Star Finch, Longtailed Finch and Pictorella are

all a little scruffy. That marvellous introduction the Red Bishop makes a first appearance and I guess the actress really must have said something very vulgar to make it puff up into such a ball of red embarrassment. The Magpie map has been fixed and there are many alterations to the text of various species; however, I don't think there is enough space left to detail them.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### BIRDS ON WEED MATS ON THE LAKE

*Doug Ross*

The heavy growth, this season, of surface weed at the eastern end of the lake has extended the feeding range of several species.

Black Duck, Grey Teal, Shoveller, White-eyed Duck, Wood Duck, Coot and Dusky Moorhen customarily follow weed mats down lake in varying numbers. They have done it again this season, but the only point of interest with them is that coot seem to have taken to resting on, and feeding from, the mats.

The main interest is that the mats have become thick enough in sheltered waters (e.g. the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek and the boat work basin off Mundaring Drive) to bear the weight of heavier birds. Many silver gulls have been seen at rest on the mats and, as well, egrets and herons have been seen actively stalking and catching food from the mats. Standing on the mats, these birds are tarsus-deep or so in water. Locomotion over the mats presents no problem.

The species so far seen stalking and feeding on the mats are : White Egret, Plumed Egret, White-faced Heron and Nankeen Night-heron (single adult bird seen stalking at noon, by the sun).

The most spectacular instance of weed feeding was that of a White-faced Heron on a mat lying at least 100 metres off shore in the angle between Bowen Drive and Kings Avenue.

*A.D. Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.*

THE ROSE ROBIN - A REGULAR WINTER VISITOR TO  
CENTRAL WESTERN NEW SOUTH WALES

*Alan Morris and Neville Schrader*

A.R. McGill (1960) gives the distribution of the Rose Robin *Petroica rosea* within New South Wales as 'frequents the rain forests and heavily timbered parts of the coast and tablelands, and partly migratory. Some birds occur in coastal open forest in winter'. The purpose of this note is to record that the Rose Robin appears to be a regular winter visitor to the central western section of this State, occupying open forest and woodland environments.

Both early and contemporary observers have failed to record the Rose Robin where other observers have found them in recent years, i.e. J.D. Cox and A.G. Hamilton (1889) did not record them for the Mudgee district; similarly Austin (1919) for the Cobbora district, E.G. Chisholm (1936) Baradine and the Pilliga scrub, and A.K. Morris (in A.M. Fox 1972) Warrumbungle National Park - all failed to locate this bird. It is of interest also to note that S.J. Heron (1973) failed to mention this species as occurring in the Orange district, which is east of the area where N.S. found the species. The information provided by these authors was fairly exhaustive, so that it must be assumed that the birds did not occur at the period when these observers were active. However, since 1968 Rose Robins have been recorded at the locations as follows:

Munghorn Gap Nature Reserve (32°23'S 149°50'E) 32 km east of Mudgee. Recorded since 1968 during winter in small numbers. Usually pairs are present but occasionally single brown plumage birds have been seen, including one which was banded on 16 May 1971 and another on 13 June 1976, both immature males. Extreme dates 20 April to 28 June. Habitat occupied was open forest and creekside vegetation.

Tannawanda Caves, Pilliga Nature Reserve (30°59'S 149°27'E) 35 km east of Baradine. Adult male seen by G. Clark (pers. comm.) on 17 April 1975 in Cypress Pine/Eucalyptus woodland near Yaminbah Creek.

Burbie Canyon, Warrumbungles National Park (31°17'S 148°58'E) 36 km west of Coonabarabran. Adult male recorded by D. and M.

CBN 4 1

Dibley on 23 August 1974, and another on 24 July 1976 by A.K.M. in eucalyptus open forest adjacent to Burble Creek.

Shawns Creek, Timor Rock, Warrumbungle National Park (31°16'S 149°08'E) 14 km west of Coonabarabran. On 20 April 1977 in streamside vegetation, an adult pair were observed.

Derringulla (31°22'S 149°20'E) 12 km south of Coonabarabran. Single immature brown plumage male observed by A.R. McGill (pers.comm.) on 13 May 1977. Dapper State Forest (32°16'S 149°10'E) 15 km south of Cobbora. An adult pair observed in eucalyptus/cypress pine woodland on 14 April 1976.

Bumberry Dam (33°08'S 148°23'E) 20 km east of Parkes, adult male, 14 May 1976 in thick vegetation on edge of stream.

Curembenya Range (32°57'S 148°24'E) 30 km north-east of Parkes, two adult males in separate locations, 27 June 1976, in cypress/Ironbark woodland.

Gingham Gap, Harvey Ranges (32°50'S 148°20'E) 17 km south-east of Peak Hill, adult male and female observed feeding in thick Acacia vegetation, 21 May 1977.

The above information indicates that Rose Robins are present in the central section of the State during the winter period, in some cases occurring regularly at the same location. In all the observations the attention of the observer was drawn by either the metallic single call or flushing of the bird. Due to the infrequent calling, an unobtrusive manner, and the habit of frequenting the tops of trees and thick secondary vegetation, this species could pass unnoticed unless heard calling. The failure of earlier ornithologists to record this bird may have been due either to their lack of experience with the species or to the fact that the Rose Robin is a recent wintering migrant on the slopes of the central west.

These records show that the Rose Robin has wintered in the Munghorn, Warrumbungle Ranges, Harvey Ranges and Curembenya Ranges from mid April to late August since 1968. Attention should therefore be paid to searching out the streamside vegetation in other timbered areas of the central west of New South Wales, particularly in the Weddin, Conimbla and Catombal Ranges where similar conditions for Rose Robins exist. This note was prompted because of the apparent increase of wintering Rose Robins



in the Australian Capital Territory as indicated by G. Clark (1976).

*References*

- T.P. Austin (1918), 'Birds of the Cobborra district', *Aust. Zool.* 1:318.  
E.G. Chisholm (1936), 'Birds of the Pilliga scrub'. *Emu* 36:32.  
G. Clark (1976), 'Bird report 1 July 1975 to 30 June 1976', *Canberra Bird Notes* 3(8):2-15.  
J.D. Cox & A.G. Hamilton (1889), 'A list of the birds of the Mudgee district', *Proc. Linn. Soc.* 4:395-424.  
A.M. Fox (1972), *Warrumbungle National Park*, 2nd edn, Government Printer, Sydney.  
S.J. Heron (1973), 'Birds of the Orange district', *Emu* 73:1-8.  
A.R. McGill (1960), *A handlist of the birds of New South Wales*, Fauna Protection Panel, Sydney.

A.K. Morris, P.O. Box 39, Coonabarabran, N.S.W. 2857.  
N. Schrader, 28 Best Street, Parkes, N.S.W. 2870.

\*\*\*\*\*

N.T. FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB FORMED

Tony Stokes, a long-standing member of C.O.G., writes to inform us that this new club has recently been formed in the Top End and has received an enthusiastic reception from local biologists.

At present the club is printing a monthly newsletter and organising monthly meetings and field trips in Darwin. However a major aim is to begin publication of a regional journal to be called the 'Northern Territory Naturalist', tentatively in March/April 1978.

The club welcomes southern subscribers and Tony advises that vol. 1 will carry many original bird articles.

Send your \$5.00 p.a. subscription to the Secretary, N.T.F.N.C., P.O. Box 39565, Winnellie, N.T. 5789.

\*\*\*\*\*

REED WARBLERS

Doug Ross

I heard one, p.m., 21 August, in the tangle of willows and reeds along the Molonglo River opposite Duntroon. The bird was still working up to its normal call but the final phrase was always there.

OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

First of all may I thank my associate (S. Graculina) for the very interesting OUT AND ABOUT produced in the last Canberra Bird Notes. Perhaps he can be tempted to produce another one in the future?

\*\*\*\*\*

One thing that he mentioned was the artificial feeding of birds in native and/or exotic gardens. It seems to me the pros and cons of this could make a good article for Canberra Bird Notes. Is there any member who feels that they have a contribution to make? One question raised was the fact that artificial feeding should be kept up continuously. But should it? No shrub produces continuous feed for birds, especially nectar-producing ones. Therefore it might be enough to just produce artificial food when natural food is scarce. This is certainly what happens in Britain. Another question is whether people who persuade birds to come to their garden should keep cats or spray their gardens with pesticides. Both of these activities will probably kill more birds than the artificial feeding will keep alive. What are your views? If you do not feel like writing a full article perhaps you could just drop a letter to the editor with your comments .

\*\*\*\*\*

The following is reproduced verbatim from the booklet published by the American Ornithologists Union entitled Abstracts - Berkeley 1977 , presumably the proceedings of a symposium held there.

69 Neonatal groping versus definitive sexual posturing of chicks on hard surfaces (ad hoc title provided in the absence of one sent by author) , J. Allen Keast, Dept of Biology, Queens University, Ontario :  
Will provide off-the-counter review of my love life from the age of 5 to 8 - in many ways the most relaxed because in those days I hadn't discovered sex.

Thinking about the last item it might be the final proof of a very contentious issue, that is whether scientists are human or not. There is a remote possibility, judging by the above, that they have a sense of humour and therefore they might be human! Perhaps another subject for an article in Canberra Bird Notes?

\*\*\*\*\*

The increasing use of maps by people working on the RAOU bird atlas scheme has meant that some errors may be highlighted in maps produced by the Division of National Mapping, Department of National Resources. If you do find any errors please do not just ignore them but write to the Division (P.O. Box 548, Queanbeyan, N.S.W. 2620) explaining where and what the error is. Alternatively Map Correction Report sheets can be obtained from the local Atlas representative, G. Clark (tel. 54 1279). Please if you do find an error do something about it - don't just leave it to 'them'.

\*\*\*\*\*

Talking about the RAOU Atlas, the first year is almost up and there are only four years left. Any help you can provide will be much appreciated, especially if you can help on a regular basis. More information can be provided by writing to Bird Atlas, 119 Dryburgh Street, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051, or ringing G. Clark on 54 1279.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Society of Wildlife Artists have produced a calendar of Australian Birds for 1978. It is available from Box 1556P, Melbourne, Vic. 3001 and costs \$6.00.

\*\*\*\*\*

The RAOU Congress this year was held at Quorn in the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. One of the highlights was of course the official opening by the Mayor. He was everything one could expect of a small town mayor and gave a very pleasant speech welcoming everybody to historic Quorn, explaining how important Quorn had been as a railway junction during the war and so on. He then jolted everybody back awake by asking a question none of the assembled ornithological intelligentsia could answer. 'How do you stop the Corellas eating the young gums that the Quorn Council had planted?' If you can answer that question the Mayor of Quorn is waiting to hear from YOU.

Wherever one goes about Canberra out of school hours one hears the rapid clacking of that latest toy - two little balls on 9" strings that clack up and down over the wrist (and often on the wrist) . This phenomenon had a new twist recently when an adult male Golden Whistler was heard imitating this rapid clacking. The scene was a Lyons garden (in an area not noted for large trees) in early November 1977.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Field list of birds of Canberra and district is available at meetings or from the Secretary. This is a must for local bird watching and has more 'potted' information than many volumes at much higher prices.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### BOOK MARKET

##### WANTED

Has anybody:

(i) a second-hand plant press for sale? Alternatively does anybody know where one can be purchased or how one can be made?

(ii) a copy of Rand and Gilliard, *Handbook of the birds of New Guinea*.

##### FOR SALE

Peter Balmford (459 The Boulevard, East Ivanhoe, Vic. 3079) has the following spares of the *Emu* for sale: vol. 7 pts 3/4; vol. 27-28; VOL 29 Pt 1; vol. 32-35; vol. 40 pt 5; vol. 50 pt 1,3,4; vol. 51 pt 3; vol. 68, vol. 69 pt 1 & 2. Please contact him if interested.

Howard Jarman (30 Waldemar Road, Heidelberg, Vic. 3084), who is the BOC librarian, has back copies of *Emu* and Crosbie Morrison's *Wildlife* for sale. Inquiries direct to him please.

B

OOK MARKET, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608.

\*\*\*\*\*

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	1
Identifying sea-birds I. All-dark Shearwaters	2
Neophema parrots	4
Field outing - Green Cape	5
The Ring-Necked Pheasant	7
C.O.G. excursion	8
Spring song	9
Scientific collecting - good or bad?	10
Sceptics all	13
Reader's Digest Complete book of Australian birds	16
Birds on weed mats on the lake	21
The Rose Robin - a regular winter visitor to central Western New South Wales	22
N.T. Field Naturalists Club formed	24
Out and about	25
Book market	27

\*\*\*\*\*

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Subscriptions:

Single member	\$3.00
Couple (with one CBN)	\$4.00
Couple (with two CBNS)	\$6.00

Secretary: Mr R. Gregory-Smith, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, Canberra, A.C.T. 2608.

Editor: Mr S.J. Wilson, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, Canberra, A.C.T. 2608.

Assistant Editor: Miss J. Wyatt

Editorial Panel: Messrs B. Baker, G. Clark and D. Purchase

\*\*\*\*\*