

Canberra bird notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 4 Number 5 January 1979

EDITORIAL

Arising from the editorial in vol. 4 no. 1, January 1978, in which I commented on some lack of material for publication, Stephen Marchant outlined his views in vol. 4 no. 3, pp. 18-19. His letter caused much discussion among C.O.G. members both in committee and privately. Two other views appear in this issue.

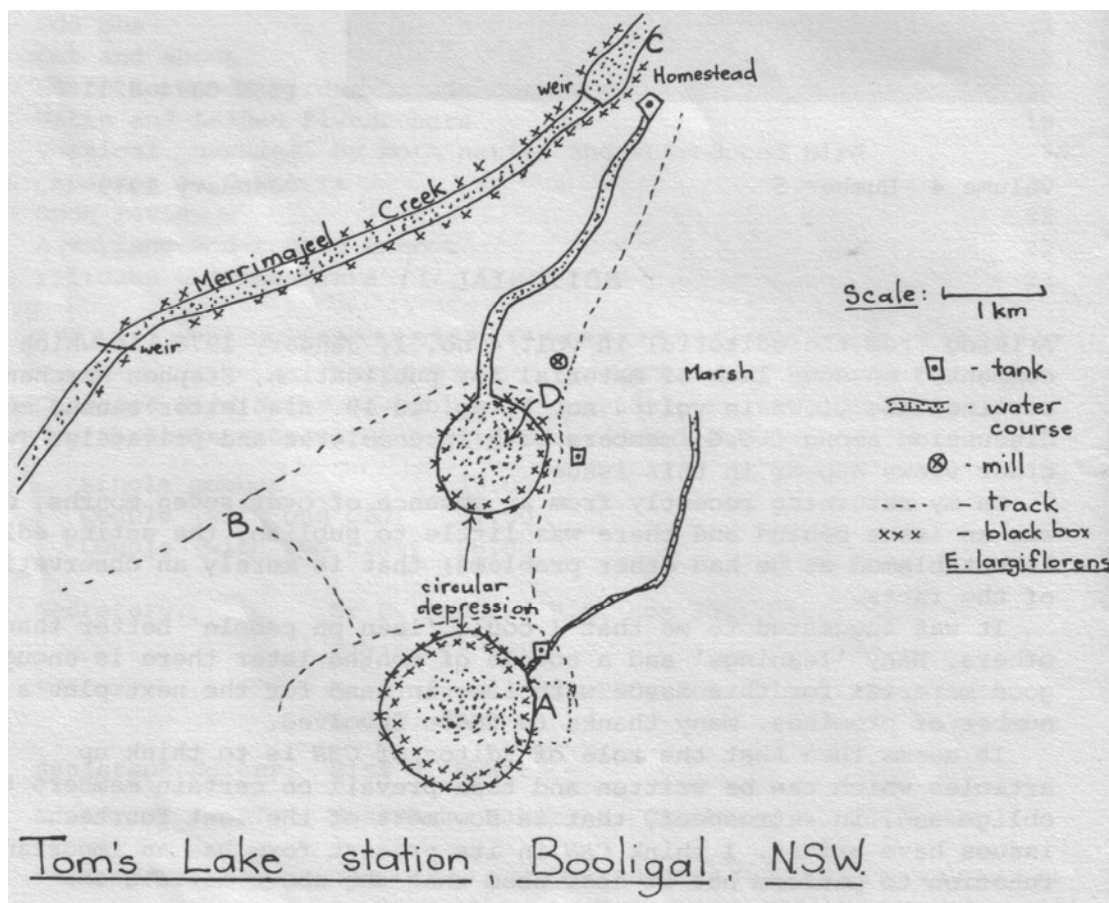
On my returning recently from an absence of over seven months, CBN was an issue behind and there was little to publish; the acting editor is not blamed as he had other problems; that is merely an observation of the facts. It was suggested to me that I could 'lean on people' better than others. Many 'leanings' and a couple of months later there is enough good material for this issue with some in hand for the next plus a number of promises. Many thanks to those involved.

It seems then that the role of Editor of CBN is to think up articles which can be written and then prevail on certain members to oblige and, in retrospect, that is how most of the last fourteen issues have arisen. I think CBN in its present form has an important function to perform but it does seem that the above defines the compulsory role of this and future editors.

BOOLIGAL BIRDS

Sonia C. Tidemann

Tom's Lake station, which has been visited at three-monthly intervals over the last eighteen months, is situated 18 km NW of Booligal, N.S.W. It is flat country which averages 250 mm (10 in) rain a year. The seasonal changes are amazing and the abundance of birds changes accordingly. In a good year one can have fun making 'body-patterns' in the lush grass which covers what was unyielding, hard, cracked,



bare ground six months earlier. Merrimajeel Creek, which runs through the property, is fed from the Lachlan Rivet and usually water is let into the creek twice a year. Periodically heavy rains at the source of the Lachlan mean an unlimited, if temporary, flow of water along Merrimajeel Creek. Channels have been dug to allow water to be distributed to tanks around the property and in this way the circular depressions (see map) receive water every few years. This was the case in October 1978 and resulted in the formation of suitable breeding habitats for a number of duck species which had not been seen previously in these areas.

There are probably four main habitats on the station. Area A is the wren study area. There is Old Man Salt-bush *Atriplex nummularia* to the west, Black Box Eucalyptus *largiflorens* on the edge of the depression, within which are rather dense wiry bushes (which scratch!) *Chenopodium nitrariaceum*. Groups of White-winged Fairy-wrens roost in the salt-bush area and, if there is sufficient ground cover, usually feed there. In harder times the birds fly through the Black Box and into the *Chenopodium*, where they hop in the bushes seeking insects and seeds. Superb Fairy-wrens live almost exclusively in the *Chenopodium*, as do the less numerous Variegated Fairy-wrens. From many hours of wandering around with binoculars focused on colour-banded birds, some interesting aspects of wren behaviour have been discovered. White-winged Fairy-wrens can have at least two broods per season. There is usually only one 'coloured' male in each family group and he assists the 'brown' birds in feeding the first lot of nestlings, which fledge after about ten days. He accompanies the fledglings, which cannot fly well at first but within about a week are almost indistinguishable from the adults. It is not known whether the female uses the same dome-shaped nest to raise the second brood, which she feeds with the help of other 'brown' birds.

White-winged Fairy-wrens are much more shy than Superb Fairy-wrens and their nests are harder to find. Superb Fairy-wrens are much more aggressive birds and hop around their nest bushes calling loudly, particularly the male, with feathers fluffed out when disturbed; they show similar behaviour towards wren models which are placed in their nest bushes, responding more strongly to members of their own species and often pecking the models. White-winged Fairy-wrens show what appears to be a more subdued display. With heads and tails lowered they flutter stretched-out

wings, intermittently hopping around the model and calling.
During this wing-flutter

display the 'coloured' males fluff out their white wing patches. As yet no observations have been made on the Variegated Fairy-wrens. The fairy-wrens share their bushes with Southern Whitefaces, thorn-bills, Zebra Finches and Red-capped Robins.

Area B is open country with occasional bushes. In this sort of area Australian Pratincoles, Crimson and Orange Chats have been seen, as well as the more common Emus, Richard's Pipits and songlarks. The numbers of birds here are lower than in the other areas.

Area C has Black Box and lots of wiry lignum bushes which Superb Fairy-wrens frequent. Merrimajeel Creek does not always contain water. When it does there are a number of water birds - Eurasian Coots, Black Swans, Australian Pelicans, ducks and cormorants, both of several species - and it is a pleasant place to sit and watch birds compared with the hot flat dry plains. However, it can be a rather sorry sight when the creek is not flowing, with birds staggering and dying around the botulism-riddled waterholes.

Area D has similar vegetation to the other circular depression but is a little deeper. In 1978 there was sufficient water available to let it flow into the depression, and in October it was waist deep in the middle. This allowed a number of birds to breed there. Red-kneed Dotterels and numerous nests of Black-winged Stilts were on the periphery. In the *Chenopodium* bushes further from the water's edge were nests of grebes, Black Swans, Eurasian Coots, Musk, Pink-eared and Blue-billed Ducks, Grey Teal and Little Grassbirds. It was certainly exciting wading through the warm muddy water and finding the nests of these birds. Hopefully the rains will come at the right times to allow this area to continue to be a suitable breeding area.

Set out below is a complete list of birds which have been seen during visits over the last eighteen months. The birds which are in italics were found to be breeding during our trip 20 October to 10 November 1978: 45 per cent of birds seen on this trip were breeding. Thanks must go to Kevin Thiele for his keen observations and help in compiling this list.

Great Crested Grebe	Little Pied Cormorant	Great Egret
Australasian Grebe	Great Cormorant	Rufous Night Heron
Hoary-headed Grebe	Little Black Cormorant	Glossy Ibis
Australian Pelican	Pacific Heron	Sacred Ibis
Pied Cormorant	White-faced Heron	Straw-necked Ibis

Royal Spoonbill
Yellow-billed
Spoonbill
Black Swan
Plumed Whistling-
Duck Freckled Duck
Australian
Shelduck Pacific
Black Duck
Grey Teal
Chestnut Teal
Australian
Shoveler
Maned Duck
Pink-eared Duck
Hardhead
Blue-billed Duck
Musk Duck
Marsh Harrier
Collared
Sparrowhawk
Spotted Harrier
Whistling Kite
Black Kite
Little Eagle
Wedge-tailed Eagle
Black-shouldered
Kite
Australian Hobby
Peregrine Falcon
Brown Falcon
Black Falcon
Australian Kestrel
Stubble Quail
Black-tailed
Native-hen
Dusky Moorhen
Purple Swamphen
Eurasian Coot
Black-winged Stilt
Red-kneed Dotterel
Masked Lapwing
Banded Lapwing
Black-fronted
Plover

Inland Dotterel
Whiskered Tern
Silver Gull
Caspian Tern
Australian Pratincole
Peaceful Dove
Common Bronzewing
Crested Pigeon
Little Corella
Galah
Ringneck
Red-rumped Parrot
Blue Bonnet
Blue-winged Parrot
Budgerigar
Cockatiel
Pallid Cuckoo
Fan-tailed Cuckoo
Black-eared Cuckoo
Horsfield's Bronze
Cuckoo
Southern Boobook
Tawny Frogmouth
Australian Owlet-
nightjar
Laughing Kookaburra
Red-backed Kingfisher
Sacred Kingfisher
Rainbow Bee-eater
Welcome Swallow
Fairy Martin
Tree Martin
Richard's Pipit
Black-faced Cuckoo-
shrike
White-winged Triller
Red-capped Robin
Rufous Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Restless Flycatcher
Grey Fantail

Willie Wagtail
Grey-crowned Babbler
Little Grassbird
Golden-headed
Cisticola
Clamorous Reed-
Warbler
Brown Songlark
Rufous Songlark
Superb Fairy-wren
Variegated Fairy-
wren
White-winged Fairy-
wren
Weebill
Western Gerygone
Chestnut-rumped
Thornbill
Yellow-rumped
Thornbill
Yellow Thornbill
Southern Whiteface
Brown Treecreeper
Spiny-cheeked
Honeyeater
Striped Honeyeater
Little Friarbird
Yellow-throated
Miner
White-plumed
Honeyeater
Orange Chat
White-fronted Chat
Crimson Chat
Mistletoebird
Striated Pardalote
European Goldfinch
House Sparrow
Zebra Finch
Common Starling
White-winged Chough
Australian Magpie-
lark
White-breasted Wood-
swallow
Masked Woodswallow
White-browed

Black-faced Pied Butcherbird Australian Raven
Woodswallow Australian Magpie Little Raven

Sonia C. Tidemann, 11 Eady Street, Dickson, A.C.T. 2602

RECORD OF THE BROWN GERYGONE AT LAKE GEORGE

Mark Clayton

During the C.O.G. outing to Lake George on 14 May 1978 a Brown Gerygone (Warbler) *Gerygone mouki* was recorded. This is the first record of the species in the local area.

The party was walking along the road near Douglas homestead on the south-western shore of the Lake at approximately 0930 hours when attention was attracted by a strange call. I have a good memory for calls and to me the bird sounded very much like the Brown Gerygone, a very common bird in the damp forests of the coast.

The bird was located feeding in a large bushy Acacia on the side of the escarpment in typical Gerygone fashion - hovering with rapid wing beats amongst the outer foliage searching for insects. I was probably the only observer to get a good look at the bird (I knew what I was looking for) but several others noticed a few field characters: the white eyebrow stripe, white tips to tail feathers, thin black bill. The call was a fairly rapid 'which-itch-a-which' (cf. Slater 'what-is-it"). Other birds feeding in the same tree and general area were the Brown and the Striated Thornbills, Superb Fairy-wren and Speckled Warbler. Compared with the thornbills the bird was a uniform ash-brown above, paler underneath and with the features noted above.

It was moving very rapidly through the vegetation, which to me is again somewhat characteristic of the species. Several species feed in a similar manner to the Brown Gerygone. As well as the two thornbills above, so too does the Little (Yellow) Thornbill, the Weebill and the two other species of Gerygone in our local area, the White-throated and the Western. Of these two only the Western could be confused with the Brown but the call is entirely different.

As noted earlier the bird is generally found in the wet sclerophyll forests of the east coast and I am familiar with it from the

Eden district of N.S.W. (where I spend a considerable amount of time working) and in several other areas where I have handled the bird during bird-banding operations. In the southern part of its range it is migratory and whether the bird seen at Lake George was 'lost' on migration I could not say. In March 1967 another common coastal migrant, the Black-faced Monarch (Flycatcher), was recorded in Hughes. This bird was a juvenile which was obviously off course, so possibly the Gerygone was off course similarly.

With some habitat of the Brindabella ranges very similar to that of the coast I am surprised that the species has not been recorded in the A.C.T. before this.

M. Clayton, 81 Maribyrrnong Avenue, Kaleen, A.C.T. 2617.

SCIENTIFIC COLLECTING - GOOD OR BAD?

Steve Wilson

The writer must accept the major responsibility for the debate on scientific collecting which arose quite by chance at a meeting but which has been carried on in eight articles in Canberra Bird Notes over quite a considerable time.

Much friendly advice was received early in the piece, generally along the line that too much bad blood would be generated, despite pleas for an objective approach; and some doubts were expressed as to the writer's state of mind! Be that as it may, the debate has been personally stimulating; many views have been expressed and a considerable amount of confidential information has been forthcoming and this is greatly appreciated.

The item is intended as something of a summary of the situation. It cannot be claimed that any problem has been solved; this was not intended. It is generally accepted that collecting is vital to gather scientific information not otherwise available from birds in the field, but if those responsible for scientific collecting have been made just a little more aware of the concern of bird watchers generally, something has been achieved. Perhaps, on the other hand, bird watchers may have been a little more educated as to the needs and practices of those responsible for collecting.

It appears that almost universally those interested in watching birds are concerned in their hearts for the welfare of both individual birds as well as species as entities. This interest, it seems, provides a climate in which rumour and exaggeration can, and do, thrive. Some individual cases have been investigated as far as possible, including the initial instance which started this debate, and it was amazing to hear the collector's version of events and to compare these with the many 'rumour' versions which were in general circulation among conservationists at that time in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere. Investigation has generally revealed that the stories grow and grow with repetition by people deeply concerned for the welfare of birds. Why? A most difficult question but that situation is quite factual.

It would be foolish to try to say that all collectors act with total responsibility at all times. There was the well-publicised case of an overseas scientist who regarded himself as above the law of many countries in this matter; there have been abuses in Australia too.

Much confidential information was forthcoming, some from scientific collectors, indicating that there are abuses. How can these be stopped? Probably they never can be is the sad answer. Nevertheless it does behove conservationists to bring to official attention any evidence of abuse of permits or similar offences. The indignation of bird lovers against collecting (sometimes of even the most reasonable number) is a very real thing and this of itself appears to be acting as something of a brake on scientific collecting. Even though this feeling is often badly informed and the result of rumour and exaggeration it is not altogether a bad thing. Collectors are aware of it; well aware of it! If there are abuses of the privilege of collecting it is probable that a vehement opposition to all collecting will continue and that message must penetrate through to those collecting, those responsible for the collecting and those issuing permits.

One ridiculous result of this climate was the case where an official hesitated to issue a particular permit and when approached later expressed the hope that the scientist had taken the specimens needed!

It does appear that conservationists are poorly informed as to what are the effects of collecting. Richard Schodde (*CBN* vol. 3 no. 9) made the point that normal taxonomic collecting 'can be expected

to have no effect whatever on survival' (of the species), because of the number of surplus birds produced each year in a stable, established, thriving (but static) population. Local banding in the Brindabella Ranges has shown that this is certainly so with many species; old birds continuously holding territory live on for quite incredible periods during which they produce one or more broods each year. If the old birds survive and other suitable territory is occupied (as it generally is), what are the prospects for the offspring? Sadly - but dispassionately - none. But even allowing for human frailty we should try not to be emotional when contemplating the natural order.

So it must be concluded that there is a harvestable surplus in a natural population. This has been adequately demonstrated with many of the species where there are open seasons, both in Australia and overseas.

Merle Baldwin (*CBN* vol. 3 no. 12) expressed doubts about Richard Schodde's theory and thought that in an area such as hers (near Inverell, N.S.W.), with small scattered populations, the populations could not stand collecting. Certainly before collecting, the effect on a small isolated population should be considered.

The matter is one needing much thought by all who are concerned. It does seem though that many of us are overly concerned for the welfare of the individual bird. A better, or at least more practical, attitude is that the individual matters little; it is the species and conservation of species with which we should really be concerned. That gets back immediately to the need to preserve adequate habitat, as it is only by the preservation of habitat that we can sustain the all-important unit - the species.

It seems that collecting is with us - it is necessary for several scientific purposes but it seems worthwhile to quote in full the resolution of the 16th World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation, which:

1. urges scientists to consider alternative ways of obtaining information before resorting to the collecting of healthy wild specimens;
2. urges major museums around the world to establish self-regulating policies that require justification by their employees of each collecting project involving wild

birds,
and to provide leadership in maintaining ethical
collecting standards in their countries;

3. urges the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to consider the possible preparation of policies and guidelines respecting the collecting of wild birds for the various purposes of museums, taking into account the long-term conservation of wild populations;
4. urges the preparation and publication of a catalogue of specimens of threatened species and subspecies of birds held in the museums of the world;
5. urges the denial of collecting permits unless those responsible for issuing them are satisfied that the species concerned will not be endangered, and that all possible scientific information will be recorded from each specimen for permanent public record;
6. urges scientists holding government permits to collect birds strictly to observe the limitations imposed by the permits granted to them, even when these appear to the scientist to be unduly restrictive.

Our debate has solved nothing. Nevertheless it is hoped that we are all a little better informed because of it. Many thanks to all whose articles were published and to those who provided much other background information.

S.J. Wilson, 2 Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

ODD OBS

BLACK KITE

Jerry Olsen

A Black Kite *Milvus migrans* was seen at the Belconnen Tip circling about 10 metres up at 1.00 p.m. on Wednesday 16 February 1978.

COLOUR-BANDED PEREGRINE FALCONS

P. & J. Olsen

A number of Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* have been colour banded near Canberra. The Peregrine bands have numbers which are visible with good binoculars. It would be appreciated if any sightings could be reported to the Australian Bird Banding Scheme, Division of Wildlife Research, CSIRO, Gungahlin, A.C.T., phone 41 1211.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

23 Horsley Cres.
Melba, A.C.T. 2617

Dear Sir,

I am writing in reply to the letter by Mr S. Marchant in *CBN* vol. 4 no. 3, July 1978. Mr Marchant brings into question the purpose of Canberra Bird Notes and similar publications, suggesting that, because of the difficulty in getting material, the four issues per year be replaced by a more prestigious annual publication. This journal would then concentrate on giving a comprehensive report of the Canberra area.

While not denying the need for this type of report, indeed it is an essential feature of local journals, it would not meet the other functions of such magazines. This is to give accounts of the club's activities and to provide a place for the publication of the writings of amateur ornithologists. In other words, a local interest magazine written in not too strictly formal style. It should not try to be a scientific publication, a need which is well met by the *Emu* (RAOU), *Corella* (the Bird Study Group) and the *Australian Birdwatcher* (BOC).

Reporting of the club outings puts into written form birds and their locations for members who were not there, as well as providing a permanent record for those who were. When the talk at the monthly meeting is of sufficient significance this should also be written up and printed in the magazine. This latter report seems to be sadly lacking in *Canberra Bird Notes*. Ordinary members need to have a publication that will print those observations which all keen amateurs make during their field trips. These observations would otherwise be unpublished and valuable material would thus be lost. It is difficult to get people to sit down and write up this information, but this is part of the job of the editor. It has been done extremely well by the present editor of *Canberra Bird Notes*, as one only needs to look at the size and variety within the past publications.

Mr Marchant is an experienced ornithologist of long standing and may have forgotten the needs of the keen amateur, those who have other ties and interests besides ornithology and those just starting.

Canberra Bird Notes should be aimed at this level as well as providing the more serious bird reports of the locality. It means, however, that the ordinary member must get to and provide the substance of the magazine.

C.A. Bear

64 Sprent Street
Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604

Dear Sir,

In a letter published in CBN vol. 4 no. 3, July 1978, Mr Marchant suggested that a local society like C.O.G. could best contribute to the state of the ornithological art by confining its publications to one substantial issue a year. This could take the form of a comprehensive bird list with one or two substantial articles. Mr Marchant went on to suggest that such an approach would make it possible to improve the physical appearance of CBN.

Not being a bibliophile, I am not particularly concerned with *CBN's* physical appearance; content counts more than format.

As for content, it seems to me that a journal should reflect the interests of the members of the issuing society. I suspect that many, if not most, members of C.O.G. would, like me, be prepared to say that, at bottom, they are interested in birds for their own sake, as beings so very different from ourselves, which we can watch or listen to for hours, in all their variety and grace and beauty, even though we may have no deep ornithological learning. That is not to say that members do not go beyond the level of sheer pleasure and seek to raise their standard of 'product knowledge'.

The present contents of CBN seem to match the varied tastes and talents of C.O.G. members admirably. There is, first, a comprehensive bird list, whereas Mr Marchant seems to suggest that this is wanting. Then there are substantial articles, some of them verging on the learned. The lesser articles could provide building blocks for learned articles, and here I note two things. First, even the rankest amateur can come across a fact worthy of scientific record. Such a fact can hardly be presented in isolation to a professional learned journal and, but for its being recorded in a periodical like *CBN*, for the professionals to take up and develop if they wish, it could drop out of sight once more. Secondly, journals like *CBN* offer

the amateur an opportunity to develop his/her skills of observation and presentation on paper. The Bodley note on a brood of Australian Kestrels (CBN vol. 4 no. 4, pp. 17-19) was a very good instance of this. If fledglings cannot stretch their wings, however unskilfully at first (and Bodley was good), later generations of ornithologists/birdwatchers may be in danger of being put with the Dromaiidae.

Still other articles may be of passing interest only, even trivial, but if I find a Peaceful Dove in my backyard, or see a Silver Gull riding on an Australian Pelican, then I want to share, if I can, the interest or amusement, and I want also to hear of comparable incidents from other people. Who knows, the trivia might one day throw up a fact worthy of permanent record.

But whatever the standard of *CBN* articles and notes, their general effect is to raise the knowledge and understanding and appreciation of members. A more rigorously learned diet could put people off.

As an economist, I go to learned journals to find out the latest in theory, but, if I want to find out what is happening in the world as regards political economy, I turn to the *Economist* - a general journal. So also with ornithology / birdwatching. Monographs and atlases can teach a lot on a general plane, but not so much about developments in one's immediate surroundings. For one reader at least, it is the immediacy, of time as of place, that is the great attraction of *CBN* reporting.

22 January 1979

A.D. Ross

7 Bamford Street
Hughes, A.C.T. 2605

Dear Sir,

Apart from the pros and cons of artificial feeding of native birds in one's yard, there are many people who delight in doing so, even to the extent of having a regular order with the butcher for pets' mince, not for their animals but for the Magpies and Kookaburras. I feel that some advice on the ways and means of artificial feeding would be appreciated. The only method I have found to prevent ants, flies, cats, rats etc. from getting at mince is to wait until the Magpies call at my kitchen window and then hand feed them.

I have not been very successful with nectar feeding - I hung a bowl from a branch and drowned too many honey bees. The Silvereyes enjoyed the nectar but no Honeyeaters appeared interested. Can anyone suggest a sound recipe for nectar and do these patent bottles work?

Then for the seed eaters - how does one make a bird table really cat proof and does a cage bird seed mixture attract Rosellas? My apricots certainly do, when ripe.

In Britain half coconuts and strings of peanuts are enjoyed by Tits - do our local birds like them? What about bread, fat and cheese as foods?

I feel there can be no objection to keeping the bird bath topped up now and de-iced in winter, more for the birds to drink than bathe in, even if the next-door cat jumps up for an occasional drink too.

Any advice would be much appreciated by

D. Johnson

This is an important subject and the above letter is full of pertinent questions. What expertise is there among C.O.G. members? If we get sufficient replies to this letter maybe we could put on a short discussion at a future C.O.G. meeting. Views please! Ed.

ODD OBS

BLACK KITE NEAR GOULBURN

M. Clayton

Coming back from holidays on 12 January 1979 a Black Kite was seen gliding over open pasture land approximately 15 kilometres on the Marulan side of Goulburn, by the Hume Highway. The species is normally a bird of the drier interior and north, found particularly around garbage dumps and abattoirs.

GREAT CRESTED GREBE

Doug Ross

A single Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* was seen at 8.30 a.m. on 18 January 1979 in the East Basin about 100 m offshore. The sighting was made from Mundaring Drive, opposite the old Power House. The bird was swimming slowly upstream towards Jerrabomberra Creek and was not feeding during the observation.

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

A new conservation group has been formed in Canberra. It is the South-East Conservation Council and its objects are the strengthening of action in support of conservation issues in the South-East Region of N.S.W. An ever present issue is of course the woodchip operations based in Eden. If you wish to obtain further information please contact the Council at P.O. Box 1875, Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601 or phone 54 4157 or 47 3064.

And now for something completely different ... A recent record that has come my way is called 'The Bird Fancier's Delight' and as it has delighted this bird fancier he will say something about it. It is a recording of recorder and spinet/harpsichord music played respectively by Rene Clemencic and Christianne Jaccothet. The title piece is the only one to do with birds but it was written in 1717 by Mr Hill and includes tunes for Woodlark, East India Nightingale, Bullfinch, Canary Bird and Parrot. If you like Renaissance and Baroque recorder music buy this record, which is a World Record Club one (WRC R-03680).

Following on from a previous item about peregrine. Falcons in the United Kingdom, another example of the pressures, on these few remaining birds has been brought to my notice. A recent AAP report stated that a man who stole three eggs from an eyrie in north-west England was ordered to pay \$1750 in fines and costs, the highest penalty ever imposed in Britain for the theft of birds eggs.

In the last issue of Canberra Bird Notes John Penhallurick wrote a short note about the intransigent French attitude to bird protection within the EEC. He finished up by saying that he hopes as many people as possible will make clear to the French government that its toleration of this scandal makes a mockery of that country's

pretensions to civilisation (but then in my opinion they are only pretensions anyway). However, if you really want to do something to help you could write to the French Ambassador or you could just not buy any French goods, whether cars or just wine. Remember if you buy anything French you are condoning a government that wishes to make a mockery of bird protection.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS - A NEW SERIES

Mark Clayton

A new series of articles under the title 'Where to watch birds' is planned for *Canberra Bird Notes*. It is realised that some people are unable to attend the outings but nevertheless would like to investigate the various areas we visit. A 'local' area and a 'weekend camping' locality will be dealt with in each of the series.

I would like to appeal to C.O.G. members to assist in the planning of field outings. It is difficult to think of new places for the outings without a continuous repetition of species. So, if you know of a good, fairly accessible bird-watching area you would like to share with others, please let me know. Also if others could advise which particular species of types of birds you would like to see, this could make the organisation of the outings a little easier for me.

M. Clayton, 81 Maribyrnong Avenue, Kaleen, A.C.T. 2617.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS - NO. 1 - MT AINSLIE

Area: The area usually visited by bird watchers is the lower southwestern slopes of Mount Ainslie bounded by the Australian War Memorial, the northern streets of Campbell, Fairbairn Avenue, the road to the summit of Mount Ainslie and on the north the rougher and steeper slopes with thicker trees and scrub.

Access: Park cars near the beginning of the road up Mount Ainslie just off Fairbairn Avenue. While the area is fenced, public access is permitted and there is an entry point not far from the corner mentioned.

General description of area: Firstly, and fairly importantly, the area is flat to slightly sloping, so even elderly people will find the going easy.

The vegetation is dominated by several species of Eucalypt and could be classed as open savannah woodland. There is a minor under-story of *Acacias*, both naturally occurring as well as introduced, *Cassinias* and a variety of plants that are both natural and what appear to be garden escapees. Pasture grasses and small native plants cover the ground.

Two of the most important floristic features of the area are the considerable amount of mistletoe growing on the Eucalypts, which provides a major food item of the Mistletoebird and others, and the regeneration of the Eucalypts following the exclusion of grazing animals in recent years.

Birds: The best time to visit this area is from about mid October to March, when most of the migratory perching species are present, although it can be worthwhile at other times of the year. Almost all the migrants present breed in the area and typical species are Noisy Friarbird, Olive-backed Oriole, White-throated and Western Gerygone (Warblers) and the Sacred Kingfisher. Other regularly breeding birds of the area are the Brown Treecreeper, Varied Sittella, Speckled Warbler, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Eastern Rosella and many others.

At times eruptions of 'western' species occur in the area and such birds as the White-browed Woodswallow, which has bred in the area, and the Little Friarbird have been recorded.

It should be noted that this area is under constant threat of development. If this happens we shall lose possibly the best natural bird-watching area close to the city, as well as losing what has become over the last few years a rarer form of habitat in the A.C.T. Every effort should be made to preserve it as it now is.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS - NO. 2 - ROUND HILL NATURE RESERVE
Area: The reserve is located between Mt Hope township and Euabalong in N.S.W.

Access: To get there takes about six hours driving from Canberra. You pass through Yass, Temora, West Wyalong and Lake Cargelligo to Euabalong or Euabalong West, then follow the signs to Mt Hope. The map indicates that the roads from Euabalong and Euabalong West join

and continue on to Mt Hope. The reserve is located at the road junction and is clearly marked with the red and white signs of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of N.S.W. The country in this part of N.S.W. is very flat so walking is easy.

General description of area: The reserve contains three types of habitat:

(i) Mallee: this covers most of the reserve and the surrounding area is probably the largest remaining area of mallee in N.S.W. For anyone who has never been into mallee before it is probably best to keep out of it as it is extremely easy to get lost.

(ii) Open regenerating farmland: this is between the mallee and the "Round Hill". Vegetation is made up of *Callitris*, *Eucalypts* (not mallee spp.), *Hakeas* and many low-spreading bushes. This is easily the best and easiest bird-watching habitat.

(iii) *Callitris*: This contains dominant stands of the native pine with little or no understory.

Birds: The best time to visit the area is probably late October. The weather then is still relatively mild and most migratory bird species have returned. It is worthwhile remembering that bird watching is generally best where different habitats meet.

Some of the more interesting birds which breed in the area are the Pink (Major Mitchell) Cockatoo, the Mulga and Mallee Ring-necked Parrots, the black-backed race of the Splendid Fairy-wren (Black-backed Wren), Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Shy Hylacola (Heath-wren), which appears to favour mallee regrowth, the Red-capped Robin, Crested Bellbird, Striped and Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters.

As it is a reserve controlled by the N.P.W.S. it would be best if intending visitors first checked with their head office in Sydney or the regional office in Griffith, N.S.W., to make sure it is permissible to camp. Members of C.O.G. who have visited Round Hill have been most impressed with the bird life in the area.

M. Clayton, 81 Maribyrnong Avenue, Kaleen, A.C.T. 2617.

SATIN AND LEADEN FLYCATCHERS

Richard Gregory-Smith

[This article is the substance of a 'bird of the month' talk given at a recent C.O.G. meeting. - Ed.]

There are four species of black and white flycatchers we are likely to see in the high country around Canberra.

The Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta* is clearly distinguished by its lack of black on the throat and breast. Its call, like scissors on an old-fashioned grindstone, is distinctive and gives it the nickname of 'scissor grinder'. The Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* has a white supercilium, black throat and white breast. These markings, together with its pronounced lateral tail movements, make this flycatcher easy to distinguish.

Then we come to the difficult ones. The Satin Flycatcher *Myiagra cyanoleuca* is found in eastern Australia from Tasmania to Cape York. The Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula* is found in the same area, but its range extends to Western Australia.

While these two flycatchers can be easily confused, their habitat is very different, and in the breeding season this is an indication of the species in our area. Both flycatchers are migratory, the Leaden arriving in mid October and leaving by mid April, the Satin arriving in the Brindabellas in October and leaving in late February. The Satin breeds only in the Ranges, while the Leaden breeds in open timbered country where there is little undergrowth. Both birds may of course be found in other habitats while on migration.

The calls of both flycatchers are rather similar, and I do not believe it possible to discriminate between them without much study. The call of the Satin Flycatcher is said to be deeper.

The male Leaden Flycatcher is as the name suggests generally leaden-grey colour. It has black wings edged with grey; the under-parts, less throat, are white, bill leaden-blue, tipped with black, legs and feet black and iris black.

The adult female is similar in colour to the male, but the wings and tail are dull brownish-grey, back brown, and the throat a dull orange-buff merging below to dull white. Some females have leaden-

white edges and tips to the tail. Both male and female have typical erectile sub-crests which are prominent when the birds are stimulated.

The male Satin Flycatcher is a darker, more shining and slightly larger version of the Leaden Flycatcher. The plumage generally is shiny deep blue-black, sometimes appearing greenish-black depending on the light. The wings are black edged with blue-black and the underparts are white. The black is more extensive on the throat than the grey of the Leaden. The bill is leaden-black, the legs and feet black and the iris black.

The adult female is dull slaty-grey above with brownish-grey wings and tail and a darker, glossier head. The throat and upper breast, however, are orange-rufous with the remainder of the underparts white. Both male and female have erectile sub-crests similar to the Leaden Flycatcher.

Whilst the adult males are reasonably distinctive in the field, the adult females are very similar in appearance. The breast colouration extends lower on the Leaden, but the colour of both varies in shade with individuals and perhaps age and the best identification point is the colour of the head, which is darker and more glossy in the Satin. Juveniles of the two species resemble the females and are indistinguishable in the field.

R. Gregory Smith, Brassey House, Barton, A.C.T. 2600.

VERTICAL 'HAWKING' BY BOTH NATIVE AND INTRODUCED
BIRD SPECIES IN CANBERRA

Henry Nix

In the older, more vegetated suburbs of Canberra, the foraging technique which I term vertical 'hawking' can be observed on many warm summer evenings. The technique takes advantage of the swarms of flying insects which are silhouetted against the backlit sky between sundown and darkness. The bird perches on a high vantage point (tree top, roof, power pole), scans the sky above and launches into a very directional, powered flight, usually less than 30° from the vertical, and, with a minimum of aerobatics, snatches the prey, hovers briefly

and glides back to a perch. Usually the bird will return to a preferred vantage point, either directly or after the prey has been consumed. Continued observations over the last five years in Turner and O'Connor suggest that the technique is successful to the extent that very few such flights fail to secure prey.

The most intriguing aspect of these observations is that the number of species exhibiting this behaviour has grown year by year. In each case there is a characteristic pattern of one or two 'early innovators' in the first season, followed by increasing numbers of that species in successive seasons. Thus, in the summer of 1975, vertical 'hawking' was the sole prerogative of Noisy Friarbirds *Philemon corniculatus*. In the following year (1976) a few Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata* were observed and in the next year (1977) Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* had joined the guild. During the recent summer of 1978 these were joined by Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis*, White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus*, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina novaehollandiae* and, to my considerable surprise, the local House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. These latter showed remarkable learning skills, in that after the first few observed flights, mainly by adult males, practically all of the local population adopted the technique. On the last evening that vertical 'hawking' was observed, in late March 1978, a single Blackbird *Turdus merula* was observed to make a number of sorties. Although most were unsuccessful it may be that this species will be added to the list later.

It is important to differentiate the vertical 'hawking' technique from the more normal 'hawking' techniques adopted by some of the species listed above. For a start, the distance to prey is usually much greater and commonly ranges from 10 m to 30 m or more. The flight upwards is fully powered and unidirectional and involves a minimum of aerodynamics in pursuit of prey. The energetic costs must be high, particularly for short-winged species like the House Sparrow, but the high success rate in capturing prey must offer compensation. Of course, the insect prey is also providing a source of protein and this must be considered in energy budgeting.

Dr H. Nix, 22 Syme Crescent, O'Connor, A.C.T. 2601.

BOOK REVIEW

Super spy birds. Published by Golden Press, Sydney, price 59 cents.

This little book of 50 pages is aimed at the 7 - 14-year-old age group. It gives a black and white picture or drawing, short description and interesting notes about more than fifty reasonably common (with a few exceptions) species of birds. The idea is that the child should go out and identify these birds and receive a certain number of points for doing so. By obtaining points the child becomes a Bird Watcher second class and ultimately first class. It is an excellent way of introducing children to bird watching and also giving them a feeling of achievement at the same time.

The book is one of the Super Spy series available from bookshops, newsagents and toy shops. It is one of many titles such as *In the street*, *On a car trip*, *In the bush* and so on.

If you know a child you can buy it for, it is well worthwhile obtaining a copy, reading it and then passing it on to the child. Not only will your gift be appreciated, I'm sure, by the child, but you may well start another young mind off on a journey to insanity, albeit a very pleasant form.

A VARIANT RED-RUMPED PARROT

Colin Richardson

On a recent trip through southern New South Wales, after camping overnight near Barellan, the route was eastwards through Ardlethan and Aria Park towards Temora. About 8.30 a.m. on 7 September 1978 just outside Aria Park a flock of the Red-rumped Parrot *Psephotus haematonotus* were feeding beside the road and it was noticed that one bird was different. At first it appeared to be a Yellow Rosella *Platycercus elegans*, but it was too small and in fact it was identical in shape and size to the Red-rumped Parrots it was with. Furthermore, although they were feeding as a flock, there was

obviously male-female pairing and the 'variant' was accompanying a particular Red-rumped Parrot male bird. The variant was mainly yellow: yellow breast, dark yellow rump and back; head, neck and shoulders were yellow, blotched with brownish-black; wings and tail had blackish flight feathers. It was observed for about fifteen minutes, as the flock moved around on the ground. Although it was drizzling, visibility was quite good. At closest approach the birds were about 10 metres away and Canon 7 x 50 binoculars were used. At no stage did the variant appear in any way separate or different from the others, except by colouring.

C. Richardson, Box 337, Bowral, N.S.W. 2576.

PELICANS OVER CANBERRA

Jon Prance

So great and graceful on the evening air,
the circle swings and lifts above the earth;
A mighty ring of specks, so far, so fair,
and all flamboyant in the stillness there.
And yet a bitter breeze attends the birth
of night and change and passing of the world;
To match this marvel as the great few fly
there is a throbbing memory lies curled
in their hub of distant beauty, where I see
the fifty thousand flying, fallen, die
from heat, and hardness, sun and drought;
a dearth of feeling too, all neatly fashioned by
our new smug science into apathy.
We didn't care, why should we, could we, can
man lament when nature takes away?
But soon I think we'll join the pelican
from forces far beyond a summer's day.
Then as we face our ugly hurried plight,
May I recall such gentleness in flight;
May I remember as at rest I lie
This one majestic spiral in the sky.

J. Prance, 2 Millhouse Crescent, Higgins, A.C.T. 2615.

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	1
Booialgal birds	2
A record of the Brown Gerygone at Lake George	6
Scientific collecting - good or bad?	7
Odd obs	10
Letters to the Editor	11
Odd obs	14
Out and about	15
Where to watch birds - a new series	16
Satin and Leaden Flycatchers	19
Vertical 'hawking' by both native and introduced bird species in Canberra Book review	20
A variant Red-rumped Parrot Pelicans over Canberra	22

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Subscriptions (due 1 July):

Single member	\$5.00
Couple (with one CBN)	\$7.00
Couple (with two CBNs)	\$8.00

Secretary:	Mr E. Andrew, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608
Editor:	Mr S. J. Wilson, P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, A.C.T. 2608
Assistant Editor:	Miss J. Wyatt
Editorial Panel:	Messrs B. Baker, G. Clark and D. Purchase
