

# Canberra bird notes

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## EDITORIAL

We have a lead time of approximately two months for the production of Canberra Bird Notes.

Normally we publish the Annual Bird Report in October each year, but as much of the material on which the report is based is not in the hands of the Records Officer until the July meeting, production of the ABR has always been something of a rush.

We are hopeful that C.O.G. will have a larger volume of records available in future from which to prepare the ABR, so this is an appropriate time to put its publication back to the January issue.

NOTES ON THE BACKGROUND OF 'BIRDS IN THE  
AUSTRALIAN HIGH COUNTRY'

*Betty Temple Watts*

In 1958 Robert Carrick suggested that I should do illustrations for a book on the A.C.T. birds. I did one plate of the Ibis and Spoonbills before coming to Canberra to live. Warren Hitchcock, John Calaby, Robert Carrick and I made a list of the birds which had been recorded in the A.C.T. and added some which we thought might turn up. We divided these into a series of plates for me to draw. Five of these were not altered after they were finished. All the others were drawn and redrawn as new birds were found and had to be fitted in.

I was greatly helped in learning about the trees and plants which I needed for the illustrations by Alec Costin and Nancy Burbidge, both scientists with CSIRO.

Don Lamm and John Calaby made early lists of the A.C.T. birds, and then Don Lamm, in Canberra again for a second period with the Embassy of the United States, with Bill Belton, also of that Embassy, and Steve Wilson and his sons gave a big boost to the bird list and, especially when banding started, to the knowledge of A.C.T. birds.

When I first finished the plates Robert Carrick took them to Scotland and the publishers Oliver and Boyd were ready to publish the book and kept the plates for two years. As there was still no script, the plates were brought back to Australia by Max Day of CSIRO.

The script really got going only when Harry Frith took over as editor, and I do not think the book would have been published without his help. The meeting which arranged this was at Steve and Nonie Wilson's home, with Hal my husband present.

At this stage I repainted the Heron plate, the Ducks and Pigeons, made a new plate with the Bustard, Brolga and the Black Swan, and made some other alterations. Harry Frith enlisted the help of the contributors named in the book .

For a time Lansdown Press were going to publish the book but in the end it was done by A.H. & A.W. Reed.

In the following notes on the plates I have quoted the bird names used in the book.

I. When I first drew the Emus in Ian Baird's paddock one tried to eat my pencil and coat buttons, then the two birds went to the dam, kicking their legs in the air and soaking their feathers. Later I sketched the female displaying and the eggs. Actually the nest was in thistles but I substituted Poa Grass, drawn where Emus used to live.

Jocelyn Long drove me on this and many other occasions.

II. The Pelican background is Lake George. The plate was altered to fit in the Little Black Cormorant and the Crested Grebe. When the Pied Cormorant turned up, it was fitted in as an obvious late arrival.

III. Repainted to fit in Plumed, Little and Cattle Egrets.

IV. The White Ibis immature is shown raising its wing nearest to an adult when begging and is from a photo by Robert Carrick. The Straw-necked Ibis has a Plaque Locust in its bill. The breeding Royal Spoonbill is from a photo by Max Downes. Except the Glossy Ibis, the birds were sketched at Heafesville, Victoria, at the Sir Colin MacKenzie Sanctuary.

V. The ducks were repainted in 1967 when the Freckled Duck and the Grass Whistle-duck were added. Bea Holt drove me out to Gungahlin to draw these and the Blue-billed Ducks on the pond. The Wood duckling I found on my nature strip with three Magpies gathered round it. Ken Keith brought up that duckling and I was able to draw it again as an adult.

VI. The Swamp Harrier was from a photo by Michael Sharland (Tasmania). The immature Brown Goshawk was a road casualty which I released when it recovered. David Fleay gave me permission to draw from the photo of his beautiful Wedge-tailed Eagle. The Little Eagle ate two Magpies at Gungahlin and was too heavy to take off, so Warren Hitchcock held it while I photographed the wing pattern. I drew it before it flew off followed aloft by two resident Magpies.

VII. The male Kestrel was from drawings and photos I made from a bird held by Warren Hitchcock. There was a dark phase Brown Hawk on this plate, but it was deleted when the Black Falcon was added.

VIII. The Tawny Frogmouth and the White-throated Nightjar were

both casualties drawn after recovery and released with Steve Wilson's help. This picture was finished, with a black background, when Wim Vestjins produced the skin of a dead bird he had found - a Masked Owl. So the plate was repainted with seven birds and a white back ground in keeping with the other plates. The Barking Owl was caught eating some Gungahlin study rabbits.

IX and X. Originally a small-scale Bustard and Brolga were at the

top of the Quail plate. In 1967 I made a new plate of Bustard, Brolga and Black Swan, the latter from a photo given me by Ed Slater. King Quail were added above the other quail and the line of grass was hiding the join in the card. The Painted Quail was first seen when put up by Steve Wilson's dog, Snowball, off the Tharwa - Tidbinbilla road. The Stubble and King Quail were drawn in a mosquito net cage on my table while the Brown Quail was drawn in Hazel Vertigan's aviary, and first seen by Hal and me at Colinton, when a horseman from the other side of the river came to see what we were doing going round and round among the bushes.

XI. The Spotless Crake was put up by my cocker spaniel. I sat for thirteen hours in all before I saw it again to get its silhouette. The spaniel found the Water Rail and Spotless Crake too, so that I was able to go back and watch them come down to drink in the reeds at the edge of the Glenelg River in Victoria. The Eastern Swampphen was watched from a boat floating past where it fed, till I could see how it held the rush root, took off the brown cover and ate the white inside.

XII and XIII. I made a second wader plate in 1967. I wish I could take out the dark kink in the Common Sandpiper's white eye stripe.

XIV. Gull-billed Terns were taken out and the Caspian and White-winged Black Terns were added. I saw the Stone Curlew chicks following an adult in western Victoria. The Caspian Tern was sketched over the Glenelg River.

XV. The pigeon plate was repainted in 1967, adding the Brush

Bronzewing and Domestic Pigeon, which is on Garema Place pavement. The Wonga is in *Eucalyptus viminalis*. Throughout the book I have used local background plants and perches in which I have seen the birds.

XVI and XVII. Nearly all were drawn in aviaries round Canberra. I could hear the white 'cocky', so tracked it down and got permission to draw it. Like other 'cockies' it wrapped its wing covert feathers round itself. One Lorikeet was rubbed out and the Swift Parrot put in after a flock were found feeding on lerps in Narrabundah by Denis Wilson. We even found a recently dead specimen.

XVIII. The Pallid Cuckoo is from a photo lent by Len Robinson

(Melbourne). The immature Fantailed Cuckoo was from a photo taken by my son Stephen and a dead bird found by Bill Helton.

XIX. The colour of the Spine-tailed Swift's gape was ascertained by a telegram to Macquarie Island, where one had just been picked up. A suitable insect was provided by Wim Vestjens.

XX. The Kookaburra was drawn from a semi-tame bird at Mallacoota, Victoria, and colour corrected from a local skin.

XXI. Norm Robinson brought me the yellow cockatoo, blue Crimson

Rosella feathers and Wahlenbergia from Tidbinbilla. The swept mound and bracken I saw at Tidbinbilla.

XXII. A Cuckoo-shrike came on to my bird table while I was trying

to paint one. Keith Hindwood (Sydney) lent me a number of photos to help with detail. Then too I had skins of all the birds from the National Museum in Melbourne or the CSIRO collection at Gungahlin. I also made notes from road victims I found.

XXIII. Both this page and XXII were altered to fit in more birds. My first Grey-crowned Babbler had its tail down. Allan McEvey (National Museum, Melbourne) said it would be better up. On our way home Hal and I picnicked under a tree where I sketched the Babbler with its tail up.

XXIV. This plate was changed to add more robins. I happened to see a female Scarlet Robin fluffed up; but I would like now to be able to preen its feathers.

XXV. The Grey Fantail was drawn from a silhouette sketch. The

Willie Wagtail was on my garden tap with a Parks and Gardens spiraea just showing.

XXVI. This plate was changed many times. The Western Warbler turned up in an acacia in my garden and the Chestnut-tailed Thornbill was found by Steve Wilson when netting at Russell Hill.

XXVII. Another page changed - the twig for the Rufous Songlark was from Ian Rowley's paddock where I saw the Songlark singing.

XXVIII. The Olive Whistler was added to this page. The male Eastern Shrike-tit I watched in a Manna Gum in my Melbourne garden. Only a few feet above me, it held the Emperor Gum Moth cocoon at either end and pecked away the bark where the cocoon was attached to the twig. Having eaten most of

the inside through the exposed hole, it dropped the cocoon and finished picking it on the ground. I still have the cocoon.

XXIX. More pardalotes and silvereyes were added to this page.

The male Spotted Pardalote is displaying as I saw it in Melbourne on 2 August 1951 with crest raised and tail tucked under. The female bird was hopping about, keeping 30 cm away from the male, who, swaying slightly, turned always towards her, making a continual peep-peep note.

XXX. The Yellow-tufted Honeyeater's nest is one of three I saw at

Colinton with Clematis above the nest. I think North mentions creeper above these nests. The Fuscous Honeyeater was first seen when it flew against my window in O'Connor. It had a yellow eye-ring and base to its bill.

XXXI. Several honeyeaters were gradually added to this page, and the Crescent was obviously fitted in at the last minute after I found them by the Murrumbidgee River.

XXXII. When this plate was first painted the Plum-headed Finch had not been found. There was an immature Goldfinch below the adult and an immature Red-browed Finch, but these had to be taken out to fit in the Greenfinch and the Beautiful Firetail.

XXXIII. Not altered!

XXXIV. The Grey Currawong was added and the heads of Ravens; Ian Rowley brought me the live birds to see. The Magpie-larks nested in a Yellow Box where I could see them while sitting at my desk.

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#### THE 'LOCAL' FAIRY-WRENS

*Sonia Tidemann*

The following was the basis of a 'birds of the month' talk at a recent C.O.G. meeting. - Ed.

*A key to distinguish FEMALE White-winged, Variegated, Splendid and Superb Fairy-wrens*

- |       |                                   |              |
|-------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. a  | Uncoloured lores and eye-patch    | White-winged |
| b     | Coloured lores and eye-patch      | 2            |
| 2. a  | Dark chestnut lores               | Variegated   |
| b     | Light chestnut/orange-brown lores | 3            |
|       | and eye-patch                     |              |
| 3. a. | Blue-grey tail, tinged with green | Splendid     |
| b.    | Brown tail, greenish wash         | Superb       |

Immature males are somewhat similar to females. Males in eclipse plumage have black bills rather than brownish.



Figure 1. White-winged

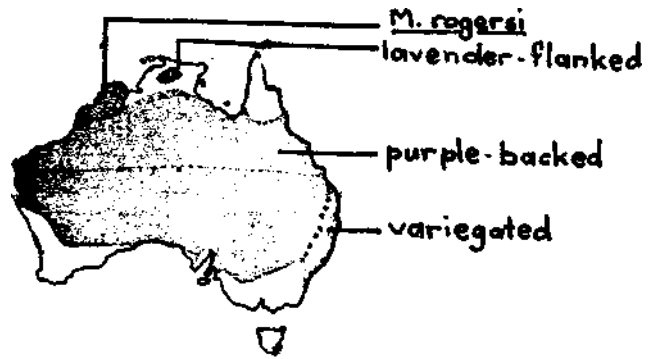


Figure 2. Variegated



Figure 3. Superb

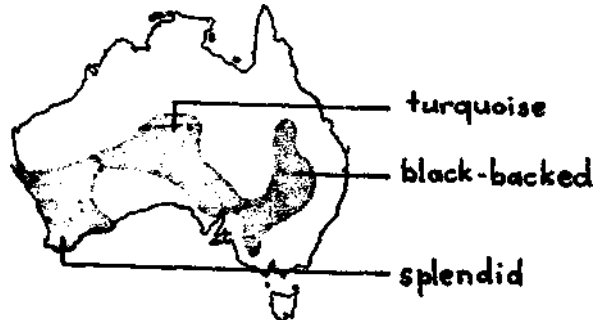


Figure 4. Splendid

**Distributions of White-winged, Variegated, Superb & Splendid Fairy-wrens**

*Sonia C. Tidemann, Department of Zoology, Australian National University, Canberra, A.C.T. 2600*



## ATTRACTING BIRDS TO GARDENS

*E.P. Finnie*

Many people in urban, suburban and rural areas enjoy the company of native birds in their home gardens. Unfortunately the simplest method of attracting them (i.e. by putting food out) can be hazardous for the birds it is desired to attract. By far the most satisfactory method for long-term attraction of birds is that discussed by David Purchase in CBN vol. 3 no. 11 p. 7 and Steve Wilson in the same issue of CBN, p. 15. In these articles the planting of suitable trees in the home garden is advocated, thus providing nectar, pollen, suitable habitat for food insects, roosting and nesting sites.

Seed-eating birds such as some of the parrots, pigeons and finches have most of their dietary needs catered for in the standard seed mixes available from pet shops and supermarkets, so that with seed-eating birds poor nutrition is not associated with artificial feeding. The problem with these birds is that if the feeding is carried out to excess the birds may become obese and they then do not move far from the feeding station to forage for natural food. Obesity may lead to reproductive failures and/or egg binding in females. Also if the person carrying out the artificial feeding is not able to continue for some reason (vacation, illness, change place of residence) and young wild birds have been reared on the artificial feeding, they may not be able to fend for themselves, therefore they starve. The obvious answer to this is that small amounts of seed only should be put out; although when one sees the number of obese dogs, cats and humans around, it is probable that most people would have insufficient self-control for this to be effective.

The larger omnivorous, insectivorous and lizard-eating birds such as kookaburras, magpies and currawongs are often artificially fed on sausages or pieces of meat. Adult birds with fully formed skeletal systems will be little affected nutritionally by this feeding regime apart from the problems related to obesity. Young birds, however, may be severely affected by such a diet, leading to bone disease, deformities and death. The reason for this is that for normal bone development calcium, phosphorus and vitamin D must be absorbed in the right proportions, an excess or deficiency in any one of the three upsetting

the balance of the other two. Meat contains a large excess of phosphorus, thus diets consisting of little else lead to diseases. Tinned dog food and dog kibble are correctly balanced nutritionally for magpies, currawongs and kookaburras, but the problems associated with excessive feeding again apply, i.e. obesity (and its associated problems) and dependence upon the artificial feeding regime.

In the case of nectar-feeding birds, the problems may be even more severe. Artificial food put out for these types of birds generally consists of honey and water, or sugar and water, while more enlightened people may add a multi-vitamin preparation. Natural food taken by the honey-eaters includes pollen and insects, which are rich in protein; the artificial diet contains no protein. Unfortunately the birds prefer to take the easy artificial offerings, leading to severe protein deficiency and under-nourishment. The addition of protein to the mixtures is no help because this simply leads to the mixture going bad quickly, and thus causing intestinal disorders.

To summarise: the artificial feeding of native birds may actually lead to a long-term decrease in the population of native birds in an area because of (a) growing dependence on the source of artificial feed, (b) obesity causing reproductive failures, and (c) nutritional deficiencies of high quality proteins, vitamins and minerals.

The best method of attracting birds to a garden is by the carefully planned planting of native trees and shrubs, and some exotic trees and shrubs.

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#### ODD OBS

#### UNUSUAL PACIFIC HERON BEHAVIOUR

Jim McNaughton

On 13 February 1979 two Pacific (White-necked) Herons were observed in the Dairy Flat area chasing carp in shallow water. The birds had their wings extended and were flapping them as they jumped along attacking the fish.

MUSK DUCKS ON LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

Doug Ross

In CBN vol. 4 no. 2 April 1978 I reported observations which seemed to confirm my earlier impression that, in the Canberra area at least, the male Musk Duck *Biziura lobata* displayed for a longer period of the year than the literature suggested.

Observations made in 1978 were rather different. The observing area was the same for both years (central and eastern basins of Lake Burley Griffin) and the number of visits about the same, although there were relatively more morning visits in 1978. The same definition of 'display' was applied.

The comparative data are shown below.

TABLE I

	Visits		No. of visits on which displays seen		No. of displays		Ratio 3:2	
	1977	1978	1977	1978	1977	1978	1977	1978
Jan.	26	23	24	33	24	79	1.0	2.39
Feb.	25	17	14	19	19	28	1.36	1.47
Mar.	28	21	19	5	24	6	1.26	1.20
Apr.	22	22	1	-	1	-	1.0	-
May	26	24	7	-	7	-	1.0	-
June	7(a)	21	-	-	-	-	-	-
July	26	23	21	-	40	-	1.90	-
Aug.	22	17	24	-	42	-	1.75	-
Sept.	20	15	25	-	40	-	1.60	-
Oct.	22	20	14	3	16	3	1.14	1.0
Nov.	26	21	32	4	61	4	1.91	1.0
Dec.	15 (b)	12	23	1	51	1	2.52	1.0

(a) No visits for three weeks. (b) No visits for two weeks.

There was no obvious reason for the March - September gap in displaying in 1978. The average number of birds seen per month was

lower in the early winter of 1977 than in the same period of 1978 yet displaying was observed then in 1977 and not in 1978. Again, the spring of 1978 saw quite a sharp fall in average monthly numbers from 1977, yet it was at that time in 1978 that displaying was seen to recommence. Comparative numbers of birds are shown below. The number for each month is the arithmetic mean of the largest number of birds seen on any one visit during the days of the month when birds were seen.

TABLE II

	<i>Jan</i>	<i>Feb</i>	<i>Mar</i>	<i>Apr</i>	<i>May</i>	<i>Jun</i>
1977	10.15	10.08	22.54	13.64	5.15	6.14
1978	22.26	21.53	19.52	25.05	20.05	17.71
	<i>Jul</i>	<i>Aug</i>	<i>Sep</i>	<i>Oct</i>	<i>Nov</i>	<i>Dec</i>
1977	18.12	14.0	14.75	8.23	15.15	16.07
1978	8.91	14.12	12.2	3.05	2.33	1.83

During these two years I also noted the number of males, recognised on the basis of lobe, size or display activity. The results cannot be regarded as indicating the species' masculinity. For one thing, male birds are more easily seen, by reason of head size, at a distance or in choppy water. By the same token, every bird not obviously male was, by definition, treated as not male - and the sex of young birds, of which considerable numbers were present on the Lake in April 1977, is indistinguishable from the shore line. It should, therefore, be expected that there were males among the birds counted as non-male.

I set out below the monthly percentages of obviously male birds to all birds seen, the percentages being based on aggregate daily figures where more than one visit was made in a day.

TABLE III (percentages)

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
39.9	53.6	59.2	36.8	34.1	11.6(a)	53.4	59.9	53.9	54.6	66.2	68.2
72.9	75.1	71.0	50.5	51.0	58.6	47.3	55.4	53.6	75.0	79.0	78.3

(a) Few visits made, and very few birds seen, in this

month: the figure could be misleading.

A comparison of Tables II and III shows that the high figures in the first quarter of 1978 were associated with a relatively high population, whereas, in the final quarter of the year, even higher percentages were associated with a very low population. This in turn prompts some questions. Why, for example, the commencement of displaying from October 1978 on (Table I) when there were so few females to display to? (On the other hand, birds have been seen displaying, in months of high population and middling 'masculinity', when there was not a female in sight.) Again, where did the 'missing' females go?

Lake Burley Griffin obviously offers good feeding for the Musk Duck. It may not provide a wealth of breeding sites, as I have seen only one brood of very young ducklings, in September 1977, although, as noted above, there were many young birds about in April 1977. Breeding may have taken place away from the Lake; in 1978 there was ample feed and deep water across the country. Predators could explain, in part, a poor local breeding record: there are foxes and at least one 100 cm goanna in the Kelly's Swamp area, but they would not explain the 'missing' females.

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#### ODD OBS

##### THE GANG-GANG COCKATOO IN CANBERRA

Doug Ross

This species seems to be increasing slowly in numbers in Canberra. One bird was seen in Narrabundah on 25 April 1979 (an unusually early record) and a flock of twenty-five was noted at Manuka at 11 a.m. on 6 May 1979.

##### SCALY THRUSH IN CANBERRA IN SUMMER

Jim McNaughton

The Scaly Thrush (Mountain Thrush) is an annual winter visitor to Canberra. On 9 and 26 November 1978, 3 December 1978 and 6 January 1979 a strange call was recorded from the pines and boxthorn at the rear of the farm house near Kelly's Swamp. Roy Wheeler later identified the calls as those of the Scaly Thrush.

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS - NO. 5 - MACQUARIE MARSHES

*Alistair Drake*

The Macquarie marshes, which are situated just north of Warren in the central western plains of New South Wales, are about 550 km - a full day's drive - from Canberra. Despite the distance, a four-day round trip visit to the area is perfectly practicable, as was demonstrated by a recent C.O.G. field outing, held over the Easter weekend. Alternatively, the marshes would make an excellent stopping-off point for anyone visiting the arid country in the far west and north-west of the State.

The marshes lie in the flood plain of the Macquarie River, and extend for about 100 km from north to south. There are extensive reed-beds, but many of the wetland areas are quite heavily wooded. The surrounding country is essentially arid, and ranges from woodland to saltbush scrub interspersed with skalds, small flat areas devoid of any vegetation. A visit to the marshes therefore presents an opportunity to see not only a variety of waterbirds, but also a selection of the dry country species of the interior.

A large part of the central region of the marshes has been declared a Nature Reserve, and is managed by the N.S.W. National Parks and Wildlife Service; permission to visit the Reserve must be obtained in advance from the Chief Ranger, N.P. & W.S. District Office, P.O. Box 39, Coonabarabran, N.S.W. 2857. However the entire area of the marshes, including the Reserve, is divided into grazing properties, and permission to enter these should be sought from the owner or tenant, even when a N.P. & W.S. permit is held. Many of the graziers are sympathetic to the needs of wildlife, and some of the properties have been declared wildlife refuges; however uninvited shooters are obviously a major problem in the area, and birdwatchers who put enthusiasm before courtesy may find that their activities are arousing suspicion and displeasure. A few areas, such as the unfenced Travelling Stock Reserves, may be visited without formality, and indeed a great deal can be seen without venturing more than a couple of hundred metres from the public roads.

The only accommodation within easy reach of the central area of the marshes is at Quambone, where there is a very small motel.

Warren has motels and a caravan ground, and these would be useful for a visit to the southern marshes, where roadside camping may also be practicable. Undoubtedly the best solution is to obtain permission to camp on one of the properties; the ideally situated campsite which C.O.G. was allowed to use over the Easter weekend did a great deal to ensure the success of that outing.

Many of the most important wetland areas are essentially inaccessible by land, and it is generally agreed that the only way to get a full appreciation of the marshes is to travel through them by flat-bottomed boat or canoe. Such a trip would certainly be rewarding, but obviously should not be undertaken lightly; the large distances, and the extensive network of channels, present real problems of endurance and navigation. There is one area, however, where a tiny section of the marshes can be viewed with ease, and a good selection of the wetland avifauna observed without leaving terra firma. This area is located on the Monkeygar Creek, at the point where it is crossed by a causeway carrying the Quambone - Coolabah road. The marshes are about a kilometre wide here, and contain reedy areas, fast-flowing channels, shallow muddy pools which are ideal for waders, and plenty of dead trees for ibis, spoonbills and raptors to perch in. During the recent C.O.G. outing this locality provided sightings of Australian Crakes, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, a Greenshank, a flock of Glossy Ibis, and a wide range of the more common waterbirds; a party of Red-winged Parrots were an unexpected bonus.

The dry country habitats are quite varied, and several different areas should be visited. About 20 km east of the Monkeygar Creek causeway, at Sandy Camp station, there is a road junction. The road running north from here up to Carinda passes through several habitats, including one area of woodland apparently still in its native state, and will definitely reward investigation. To the west of the marshes the Quambone - Coolabah road passes through patches of saltbush country which are well worth exploring. The Warren - Carinda road, which runs just to the west of the marshes, also presents many opportunities for birdwatching; one temporarily inundated area bordering this road proved very profitable for the C.O.G. party at Easter, with Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets being seen, as well as a flock of the Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Throughout the drier country any area of surface water is likely to attract birds, and the semi-permanent creeks, such as the



Bulgeraga on the Quambone - Coolabah road, and the  
Marthaguy on the Sandy Camp - Carinda road, will generally  
repay

an exploration. Some of the more exciting dry country birds seen during the Easter C.O.G. outing were Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Chestnut-crowned Babbler, White-bellied and Ground Cuckoo-shrikes, Blue Bonnet and Mallee Ringneck, and a Spotted Bowerbird.

The extent to which the avifauna of the Macquarie marshes area differs from that around Canberra is perhaps best illustrated by a list of the more common species. White-breasted and White-browed Woodswallows, White-plumed Honeyeaters and Yellow-throated Miners are all numerous, while Restless Flycatcher, Hooded Robin, Pied Butcherbird, Southern Whiteface, Zebra and Double-barred Finches, and Emu, are common birds. Other species characteristic of the area include Banded Lapwing, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Peaceful and Bar-shouldered Doves, Brown Treecreeper, Black-faced Woodswallow and Cockatiel, all seen by the C.O.G. party during the Easter weekend. Observations such as these will satisfy the visitor from Canberra who has temporarily tired of the usual Southern Tablelands birdwatching fare, and should adequately reward him for the effort of his journey.

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ODD OBS

UNUSUAL BIRDS AT DAIRY FLAT AREA Jim McNaughton

4 March 1979	Intermediate (Plumed) Egret	4
4 March 1979	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	4
1 March 1979	Great (White) Egret	4
16 February 1979	Baillon's (Marsh) Crake	1
22 February 1979	Australian (Spotted) Crake	2
13 February 1979	Brown Goshawk	2

UNUSUAL 'CITY' BIRDS Steve Wilson

Caswell Drive - 12 May 1979  
One Wedge-tailed Eagle (unusually close to the city)  
One Tawny Frogmouth

## A BREEDING WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJAR

*John Penhallurick*

On 26 December 1978 Stephen Marchant and I went looking for the White-throated Nightjar *Caprimulgus mystacalis* in the hills behind Moruya. We concentrated on the most likely habitat - a rocky ridge, well timbered, with plenty of fallen leaves and bark, but little undergrowth.

Nightjars are crepuscular feeders, and during the day roost on the ground, where they are perfectly camouflaged among the litter. We walked back and forth and eventually put up a pair of birds. We did not see them until they rose from the ground some 5 metres ahead of us, and flitted away silently through the trees.

After searching for a few minutes, we found the single chick, which was also well camouflaged. Covered with brownish down, it crouched motionless among the leaves and bark. As I hoped to get a photo of the birds, we sat down and waited some 40 metres away. However, after half an hour there was no sign of the parents. Since we did not want to keep them away from the chick, we left, after carefully noting the chick's position.

Later the same day I returned, hoping to get a photo of the birds on the ground where the chick had been. But there was no sign of them. After walking around for a few minutes, I finally put the birds up some 15 metres from the original spot (again without seeing them first) and again found the chick.

At 7.30 that evening we returned in the hope of taping the nightjars' call. We finally heard them call three times at around 9 p.m., well after dusk. In Slater's book the call is described as 'several hoarse notes that could be described as a cackle'. This description is unfortunately almost useless. The one in the *Reader's Digest Complete book of Australian birds* is more accurate. The call consists of three fairly slow ook-ook-ook notes, evenly spaced and rising slightly in pitch, followed by a rapid continuation of ook-ook-ook ..., quickly rising in pitch.

Of particular interest was what appeared to be another call, heard once, which is not described in either of the above books. It resembled two wooden blocks being knocked softly together, and reminded

me of the description in Slater of the call of the Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* , which is likened to the sound of a distant chopping of wood.

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

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

A couple of comments on John Penhallurick's very good summary of the Albatrosses. I take it he was being ironic when he wrote that the Royal Albatross's black cutting edge to the mandible could be difficult to see at 'over 400 metres'. I should put the limiting distance near 40! The Yellow-nosed Albatross is really quite small in appearance and is a very white-looking bird. I don't think the Buller's white cap is very obvious; what is obvious is the different underwing from that of the Grey-headed Albatross.

John Cox's paper should have been included in the list of references. This is available from the S.A.O.A. as a reprint from the *S.A. Ornithologist* and is called 'The identification of the smaller Australasian Diomedea etc.' Cox points out errors in several of the previous books dealing with seabirds. The new *Field guide to seabirds* by Tuck seems to have accurate descriptions, but I have only just received it so haven't had a proper look yet.

*Alan Cowan, 6A Vancouver Street, Red Hill, A.C.T. 2603*

ANOTHER CHANNEL-BILLED

Editor

The Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* is represented by three earlier records in the *Field-list*. Billie Gill, an expert on the birds of north Queensland and now resident in Canberra, saw and heard another flying over Gungahlin on 10 December 1978. The bird was about 175 metres away and was in view for 1-2 minutes.

## FURTHER NOTES ON THE FUSCOUS HONEYEATER

*Alastair Morrison*

In the summer of 1977-78 I revisited all the areas where I had observed this species earlier. See *CBN* vol. 3 no. 11 pp. 20-21. Each locality was visited in November 1977 and Fuscous Honeyeaters were found to be common in all of them. They also occurred in the woodland on the true right bank of the Gudgenby between the Ranger's quarters and Glendale Crossing and in the open woodland by the Orroral Road just beyond the grid at about 775527. Six nests were located.

Search elsewhere did not, however, reveal any of the species at Smoker's Flat or north of the Corin Road to the east of Smoker's Gap or in the upper Naas valley near the Boboyan Road.

In the 1978-79 season I confined observations to the area around the picnic ground at the Orroral Creek crossing. The Fuscous Honeyeater favours the woodland on both sides of the road just west of the grid at the top of the hill leading up from Rocky Crossing. Incidentally this area is a good locality for summer birds of many other kinds.

On 31 August 1978 and 18 October 1978 the Fuscous Honeyeaters were abundant but there were no signs of breeding; however nesting was under way in early November 1978. The species seems to suffer from much nest predation early in the season, perhaps due to the numbers of Pied Currawongs about at this time. Most of the Pied Currawongs seem to have moved on by the end of December 1978. Nesting was still in full swing at the end of January 1979.

Where it occurs the Fuscous Honeyeater is the dominant small honeyeater though I have seen occasional Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters in the quite limited Fuscous areas. In its movements the Fuscous much resembles the White-plumed Honeyeater but I have never seen the latter in Fuscous country. The Fuscous Honeyeater often descends to the ground and I have not seen it in areas where there is any undergrowth.

All the birds that I have seen early in the year have been black-billed. The earliest that I have seen a yellow-gaped bird is the end of December. From then on they become quite common. One might infer that the birds with yellow gapes and eye rings are juveniles but the

Editor tells me that the position regarding the two phases is more complicated than this. He will, I hope, elaborate in a footnote.

A.R.G. Morrison, 26 Canning Street, Ainslie, A.C.T. 2602

*Editorial note*

Most bird watchers have assumed that the yellow gape in honeyeaters was a juvenile character. Spurge (1968) suspected that this was not so in the Fuscous Honeyeater. Until this species was the subject of banding studies it was not possible to solve the mystery. Lane (1974) showed by banding that individual birds changed seasonally from black gapes to yellow and back to black. Morris (1974) also came to a similar conclusion. Dow (1973 and 1975) analysed museum specimens and found that there were dark flanges of the gape in 75 per cent of males taken in September-October but 100 per cent of females, thus tending to confirm the opinions of the other authors quoted. The last word has not been said and further research on banded birds or captive populations is needed.

Dow agreed that the yellow flange and gape of the Fuscous Honey-eater is not a juvenile character only. Two quotes from him may be helpful:

The pale fleshy gape is very much a character of juvenile passerines, and I am still inclined towards my previous suggestion that this 'characteristic could be somehow retained (or perhaps hormonally recovered) in adults.

Perhaps there has been considerable natural selection for the soft parts of the bill to be used as a social signal at close quarters.

In summary, the yellow gape of the Fuscous Honeyeater is not a sexual character, it is present in all juveniles, but the yellow gape returns (having changed to black after the juvenile period), probably in breeding birds.

Mr Morrison pointed out that the above references are not readily available and that the information has yet to find its way into the field guides; hence this note.

Dow, D.D. (1973), 'Sex ratios and oral flange characteristics of selected genera of Australian honeyeaters in museum collections', *Emu* 73, 41-50.

Dow, D.D. (1975), 'The enigma of colour change in the oral flanges of honeyeaters', 13, 31-33.



Lane, S.G. (1974), 'Soft part colours in Fuscous Honeyeaters',  
*Australian Bird Bander* 12, 55-7.  
Morris, P.J. (1974), 'Fuscous Honeyeaters in the Mudgee district', *Australian Bird Bander* 12, 58.  
Spurge, P.J. (1968), 'Variation in Fuscous Honeyeaters',  
*Australian Bird Bander* 6, 58.

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#### BOOK MARKET

##### WANTED

Canberra Bird Notes. Quite frequently the Editor receives inquiries for back copies and at present several requests for early issues are held. If your old issues are not required, please return them to the Editor, who will pass them to others trying to complete their volumes. See the Editor at meetings or ring 95 7128.

##### AVAILABLE

Canberra Bird Notes. The following issues are available from the Editor at 50 cents per copy:

Vol. 1 - Nos 3, 4, 13

Vol. 2 - Nos 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10

Vol. 3 - Nos 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Vol. 4 - Nos I, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Ian Rowley's *Bird life* (Australian Naturalists Library) - \$6.00 (new price \$9.50). Contact the Editor - 95 7128.

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#### ODD OBS

##### AN UNUSUAL WHITE-FACED HERON

Doug Ross

A friend has reported a White-faced Heron in his garden on the ridge at Fisher for several days in mid June 1979. One wonders what was the attraction. There is no pool on the property.



OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

The symposium held this year by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union was on the subject of birds of prey. So much interest was shown by those attending that a Raptor Group was formed. The Raptor Group will operate in a similar manner to the Seabird Group, charging a small annual fee to cover newsletter and administration costs.

If you are interested in raptors and would like further information you are invited to write to David Baker-Gabb, Zoology Dept, Monash University, Clayton, Vic. 3168.

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Talking about the RAOU, they have moved their headquarters from North Melbourne into the heart of Edna Everage country - Moonee Ponds! The new address is 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3009. (Note: Gladstone not Gladioli St.) The move was made necessary by the work involved with the growth of the Atlas and the increase in other activities such as the Raptor Group. One way you can support ornithological activity is by joining the RAOU - all are welcome, not just professionals. If you want further details write to the above address.

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For those who are interested in 'ticking' as a form of bird watching, John McKean has formed an organisation known as the Australian Birding Association. If you want a copy of their tick list write to John at 31 Rosella Cres., Wulagi, N.T. 5792, but please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

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Somebody who shall be nameless told me that the above Association was the Australian group of International Delegates in Ornithological Ticking Societies. Initially I believed him - but now I am not so sure.

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If you are to visit Tasmania in the future you may be interested in the book *Tasmanian bird atlas*. It is the result of the preliminary Atlas scheme conducted by the Bird Observers Association of Tasmania. It consists of 138 individual maps for the most widespread species, with footnotes on further details of the species. The book is 171 pages, 220 x 150 mm, and is available from 'Fauna of Tasmania', University of Tasmania, Box 252C, G.P.O., Hobart, Tas. 7001. The price is \$4.00, which includes postage.

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The Bird Observers Club has produced two pamphlets which are available from them (stamped addressed envelope, please) at P.O. Box 185, Nunawading, Vic. 3131. The pamphlets are entitled 'How to attract native birds to your garden' and 'How to build nest boxes'.

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The recent RAOU newsletter (June 1979) contained a note about a Black-fronted Plover (or Dotterel for traditionalists) which reared three young between the rails of the main Sydney - Melbourne line. I am not sure whether this proves the tenacity of the birds or the lack of rail traffic - take your pick.

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#### ODD OBS

UNUSUAL NUMBERS AT DAIRY FLAT AREA                      Jim McNaughton

Recently there have been some unusually high numbers sighted in the general Dairy Flat area:

4 March 1979	Rufous (Nankeen) Night Heron	14
	all of them immatures	
4 March 1979	Black-fronted Plover (Dotterel)	16
4 March 1979	Australasian (Blue-winged) Shoveler	71
13 February 1979	Pacific (White-necked) Heron	27
22 February 1979	Sacred (White) Ibis	35
1 March 1979	Hoary-headed Grebe	188
4 March 1979	Australian Shelduck (Mountain)	45

20 February 1979 Hoary-headed Grebe

265

CBN 4 8

28 October 1979

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

2 March 1979

Dear Sir,

Through your pages I would like to express my dismay at the examples of male chauvinism which appear in the 'Recommended English names for Australian birds' (*Emu* 77 Supplement, 1978). Scattered throughout the names are references to 'man'. This is sexist and wherever reference to 'man' is made it should be replaced by 'person'. For example:

Light-persontled Sooty Albatross  
Personx Shearwater  
Personed Duck  
Taspersonian Native-hen  
Calapersonthus  
Persongrove Gerygone  
Pictorella Personnikin  
Trumpet Personucode

Indeed, the replacement of 'man' by 'person' and 'men' by 'persons' should be undertaken throughout the English language.

We depersond an improvepersonst in the perforpersonce of the personagepersonst of the RAOU, which is at present detripersonstal to wopersonss epersonncipation. If it doesn't personsd its ways it can go and strum its persondolin in some other elepersonst - preferably one full of personure!

Yours in wopersons liberation,  
Ida Down (Ms)

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