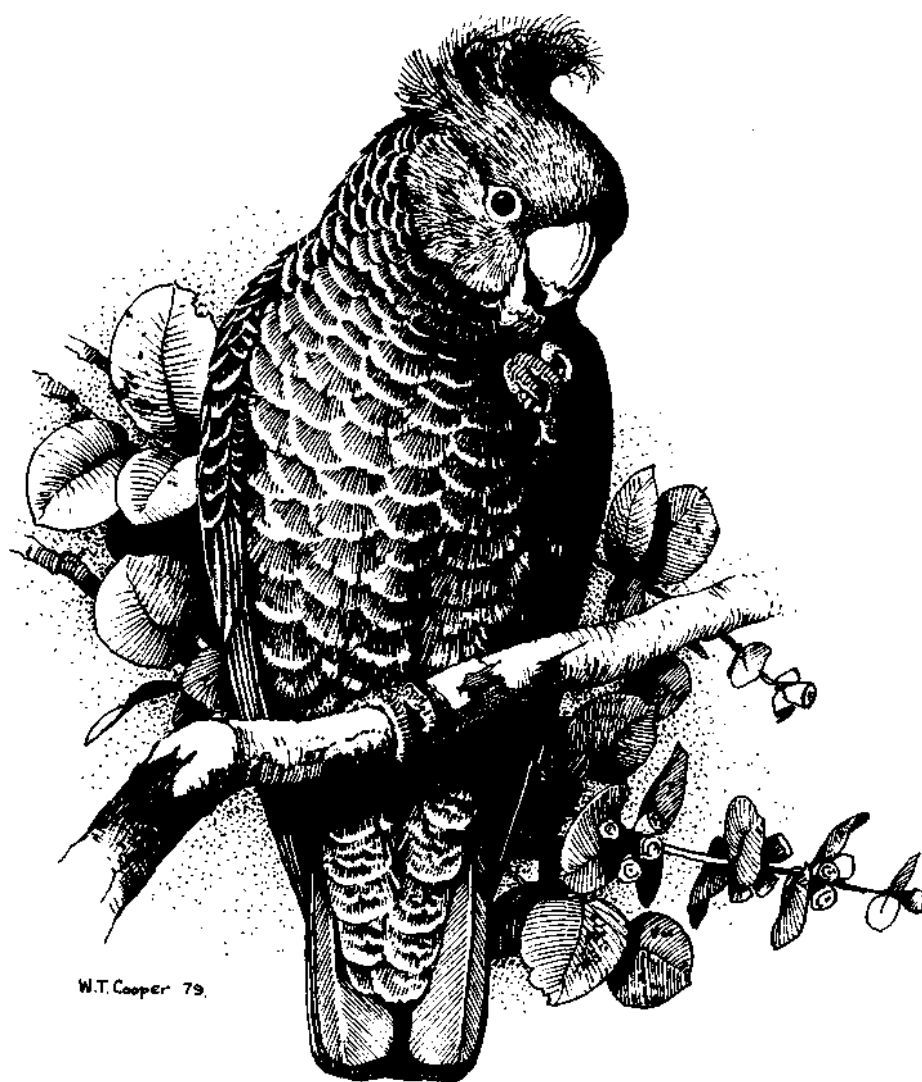


ISSN 0314-8211

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Volume 5
Number 4
October 1980



EDITORIAL

Recent Canberra Bird Notes have carried articles larger than usual; this has had the effect of delaying publication of a multitude of small papers from our members. The Editor tenders an apology to these reliable members; the ideal is always to have sufficient material for the next issue but still be able to publish all material without delay; after all we all like to see our brain children in print immediately!

The Editor must now admit something obvious to the contributors - at one stage recently sufficient material was on hand for four normal issues and hence recent issues of 48, 28 and 28 pages against a normal size of 24 pages. What a contrast this has been to the situation discussed in the Editorials of Vol 4 Nos 1 and 5. Sincere thanks to all who have made contributions to C.B.N.

This issue will largely clear the "in" basket so the process of "leaning on" prospective contributors may have to start again. Please put on the thinking cap and get the pen working! C.B.N. has a unique reputation among natural history journals of similar aims - all issues come out on time and many are larger than the regular size. This has been possible because of the co-operation of a large number of members who have provided material for publication - and interesting stuff it is too. Again many thanks; keep up the good work!!

Constant requests for back numbers are received from members anxious to build up their back copies of Canberra Bird Notes. Most members keep all copies (many have all issues); others discard their copies after reading.

If you are not anxious to keep your C.B.N.'s then to the meetings and give them to the Editor, where available, are sold by the Editor (for C.O.G.. please bring Old issues, funds) for 50c each.

THE AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE - BREEDING BEHAVIOUR

E.G. Metcalf

Robert Carrick's research papers on the Australian Magpie have long interested me; (eg. his "Population Ecology of the Australian Black-backed Magpie, Royal Penguin, and Silver Gull"; October 1969). When I found that a Magpie was established in my garden, I looked forward to being able to discover even more precise details of behaviour.

Carrick notes, P.45, that the hen "alone selects the nestsite, builds, incubates, and often rears the young with little or no assistance" from the cock. The purpose of this paper is to record precisely the division of labour, at least of the pair in my garden, and to indicate my greater respect for the work of the cock than I had been led to expect from my reading.

The nest was in a Yellow Box, *E. melliodora*, nearly 25m up. At this height, it was necessary for me to move well away from the tree to see the nest well, and I established a chair at the limits of my garden, over 30m from the tree. I had a clear view of the whole field of activity.

The nest area was one of two that had evidently been investigated previously but never used in five years by Magpies. It seemed an unwholesome mass of wire, too big to be spanned by twigs, and it seemed that an egg would be doomed to fall through. Building was begun by the hen on 10 July 1979 and she seemed to know what she was doing with the wire. The cock did not help; I did see him once, arriving at the nest with a long twig in his beak, and offering it to the hen. With reason, in my view, she ignored it. He shuffled it about in his beak and then let it fall, bough by bough, to earth, watching it all the way. Then he raised his head, smartened himself up, and leapt into space, and was not seen at the tree for a month. He returned then to participate in the short procedure of mating, on the 18 August, 1979.

The hen brooded from 25 August to the hatching on 14 September. On day one I saw no feeding. On day two the hen fed the young. The male did arrive once with a portion, offering it; and it was taken, after inspection by the female, and passed down into the nest. From then on, the feeding was fairly evenly done between the pair.

When it rained, the female remained on the nest, and the male fetched all the food. On day fifteen there was 25mm of rain and from 1330 to 1440 hours the female sat while the male brought the food for both herself and the young. Close above the nest ran a small but sturdy dead bough upon which the cock would alight. After passing the food to the hen, he would make

a pretence of sitting, loitering for two or three seconds before flying off for more.

By day twenty-three, it was clear there was only one chick. The young bird had become aware of its wings, without seeming to know what to do with them. It seemed to fear the wind, and it crouched down into the nest whenever it was blowing. Actually it stayed out of sight in the nest most of the time, and even when being fed, was seldom seen. This pattern continued to the end of this period.

Up to this stage, the parents had been flying directly up and down to the nest. Now, the procedure changed. From this day on, when each parent arrived at, or flew from, the nest, each approached and left from above, within sight of the young. They would pause on a bough a metre above the nestling. This feeding routine went on to day twenty-six. The female was still spending 20 minutes in the hour on the nest.

By day thirty, feeding was limited. The cock fed about twice in the hour, and the hen only spasmodically. The young one obviously needed less, and was seen to reject food offered by the cock. The hen had begun teaching the young about sounds. On a corner of the tree, below the nest she would alight, calling and moving from place to place for 20 minutes at a stretch looking up all the time, until she reached the nest, where she would settle in for the next half hour.

On day thirty-two the temperature in the morning was 1°C, and the young bird was not seen until 1100 hours; hawks and currawongs also caused it to keep its head down. Then the female began inducing the young one to fly. It seemed a slow learner and adverse to exercise. Two days later, both parents were busy calling to the young. They called from within the tree, and from three vantage points well away from the tree. They called constantly mostly in unison. By day thirty-four, the youngster was calling back. The parents called musically in two syllables of even stress: "keee-wik". At this juncture, the cock fed on steadily at about three of four times to the hour; and the juvenile began to make sounds like a young Magpie.

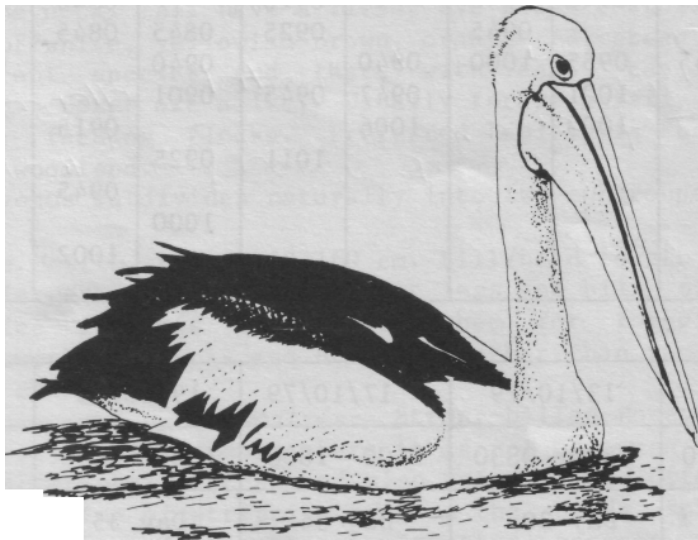
On day thirty-five the parents seemed to have done all they could do - they had completed the first lessons, as it were. They were both feeding and both calling, now in a sound, drawn-out and musical: "koook"; and it sent the young into fits of activity.

Early on day thirty-seven, with no parents present, the young flew. It launched into space and came to earth three houses away. I did not see it for three days, though its progress through the back-gardens of O'Connor could be marked by prodigious barking of dogs and alarm calls from its distracted parents.

Four months later, it was seen in sole possession of the nest, as token to its parents that he/she was grown-up. Until then, it had been accompanied by one of the other wherever it went, except when it became lost, which was often.

The above observations, documented in summary in the accompanying chart, vindicate the fatherhood of the Australian Magpie.

VAC



A contribution from Alistair Drake

SHOWING DIVISION OF LABOUR OF FEEDING ONE
JUVENILE MAGPIE BETWEEN 17 SEPT 1979 AND 21 OCT 1979

17/9/79		18/9/79		23/9/79		28/9/79		3/10/79	
0830- 0945hrs		0845 - 1005		0815 - 1015		0830- 1002		0800- 0930	
Day 3		Day 4		Day 9		Day 15		Day 20	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0850	0830		0900		0845		0830		0840
	0840		0930		0901		0835		0846
	0845	0940	0940		0910		0840	0907	
			0945		0925	0845	0845		0915
	0945	0955	1000	0940		0940		0920	
		1001		0947	0945	0901			0921
		1003		1006			0915		
					1011	0925	0945		
						1000	1002		

9/10/79		13/10/79		17/10/79		19/10/79		21/10/79	
0800 - 0930		0800 - 0830		1600- 1800		1000- 1100			
Day 26		Day 30		Day 34		Day 35		Day 37	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M F	
0815	0816	0805		1600		1000		Young	
0840	0845	0830	flie	1610		1005			
0850	0851	0840	call	1620			1020		
0910	0915	0900	ing	1635		1022			
0920	0920	0915		1710		1040	1040		
	0930		0930	1735			1055		
				1750					

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THE WHITE-NAPED HONEYEATERS

Henry Nix

Note: This item is based on a recent "Bird of the Month" talk-Ed

The distinctive genus *Melithreptus* has six species endemic to Australia, with one species extending its range into southern New Guinea. The generic name comes from the Greek, meli=honey, threptos=nourished. But of course honeyeaters take nectar (and sometimes pollen) rather than honey. In this case the name is singularly inappropriate since the white-naped honeyeaters are primarily insectivorous. All six species are of similar shape and colour pattern, with upper parts greenish through olive to yellowish-brown and under parts white or off white. The head is sooty brown to black and all but one species have the characteristic white or off white circlet or crescent on the nape of the neck. All have a fleshy eye patch that is variously coloured offwhite, yellowish-brown, orange-red, green and blue in different species and that, with care, can serve as a diagnostic. Sexes are alike. Usually forage noisily in small groups or feeding flocks. Preferred habitat is Eucalypt open forest or woodland.

The genus subdivides naturally into two subgroups based on size.

1. Large *Melithreptus*: 150-160 cm. Bill/head length ratio 0.7. The larger size and more robust legs and bill of the two species in this group. fit them for foraging in the framework of trunks and branches rather than in the outer leaf canopy.
1. *Melithreptus validirostris*: Strong-billed Honeyeater. Restricted to Tasmania where it is not uncommon in wet and dry sclerophyll forest and also rainforest. Often detected by the noise of stripping bark as the birds forage among the trunk and branches. In this respect, the species appears to fill the niche of the Shriketit rather than the Treecreeper as has been suggested. Although very similar and obviously closely related to the mainland representative, the Black-chinned Honeyeater, its calls are quite different from that species. Eyepatch pale blue. Black chin patch.
2. *Melithreptus gularis*: Black-chinned Honeyeater. Occurs throughout the drier Eucalypt open forest and woodland in Eastern and northern Australia. (The golden-backed form which occurs across the far northern savannahs was once regarded as a separate species.) In our local region, this species has not been recorded further east than about Murrumburrah-Harden and can usually be

located in Ingalba Nature Reserve near Temora. The eye patch is pale blue. While the black chin patch is not always immediately distinctive, it has the effect of producing a white stripe running from the bill back to the demarcation line between the black head and olive-yellow back. In the side view this white line together with the white crescent gives a distinctive double stripe appearance. However, the most distinctive feature of this species is its voice. The very loud, grating whistle is once heard never forgotten! Members should keep an eye (and an ear!) out for this species as it is one that could show up in Canberra.

B. Small *Melithreptus*: 125-140cm. Bill/head length ratio 0.6.

The smaller size of the four species in this group fits them very well for foraging among the leaves of the outer canopy, where they glean insects, often hanging suspended upside down.

3. *Melithreptus affinis*: Black-headed Honeyeater. This species is restricted to Tasmania and the Bass Straight islands, where it is relatively common in open forest, woodland and city gardens. Closely resembles the mainland White-naped Honeyeater but lacks the white crescent on nape. Eye patch very pale greenish. Sharp piping whistle which is distinctive from, but shows a relationship to the White-naped Honeyeater. Conventional wisdom would have this island species a derivative of the mainland stocks, formed by isolation. However, I think it equally likely that this species may be closer to the ancestral form and that the mainland species are derivative.

4. *Melithreptus lunatus*: White-naped Honeyeater. This occurs throughout the Eucalypt open forests of Southern and Eastern Australia and with an isolated population in the south-West corner of Western Australia. This is the species most commonly observed around Canberra, where it is a migrant, departing northwards in late March-April and returning in late August to September, but with some birds still moving through as late as November. In autumn flocks of many thousands of these birds, often in company with the Yellow-faced Honeyeater (*Lichenostomus chrysops*) pass through Canberra suburbs. Flowering Banksias (*B. ericifolia*, *B. integrifolia*, *B. marginata*, *B. spinulosa*) and Eucalyptus *leucoxylon* in gardens, provide nectar as an energy source for the long trip.

This species is readily distinguished from the only other *Melithreptus* species occurring locally, the Brown-headed Honeyeater, by its clean-cut appearance with

greenish-olive back, and clear white underparts with a black head and a well defined white crescent on the nape. Eye patch is orange-red (greenish in Western Australia) but in juveniles is off-white. The call is a peevish, scratching two-note, but also has a sharp contact call, rather like a querulous "tserp, tserp".

5. *Melithreptus albogularis*: White-throated Honeyeater.

This species replaces the White-naped Honeyeater in the lowland forests and woodlands from about Grafton northwards into Queensland, across northern Australia and with a restricted occurrence in the drier seasonal forests of southern New Guinea. During the winter, there is a considerable overlap of this and the preceding species in eastern Queensland, so take care when identifying members of this group while on your northern holiday. Further complications are introduced by the fact that small breeding populations of the White-naped Honeyeater occur on the more temperate upland areas of Queensland such as the Atherton Tableland, Eungella Range, Kroombit Tops, Blackdown Tableland and Consuelo Tableland.

This species is distinguished by a clear white throat with no black extending under the bill as in the White-naped Honeyeater. Also the white crescent is much more evident, extending around the nape and forward to the eyes. Eye patch bluish.

6. *Melithreptus brevirostris*: Brown-headed Honeyeater.

This species is the smallest member of the group and occurs throughout a drier range of habitats across southern Australia in dry sclerophyll forest, woodland and mallee. The specific name *brevirostris* is Latin for short bill, but the bill/head length ratio of 0.6 does not differ significantly from that of other small members of the genus.

This species is uncommon in the Canberra region, but appears to be sedentary. Small groups of 5-10 birds work over a rather extensive foraging range and may only be noted sporadically. Possibly, the species is overlooked or confused with the White-naped Honeyeater. A common call is a harsh, double-note, not unlike that of the White-naped Honeyeater, but louder and resembling the passage of a metal shovel over a hard surface while mixing sand and gravel. Learn this distinctive call and you will have no difficulty in locating this species. Contact calls also resemble that of the White-naped Honeyeater, but are a subdued "tserp" or "tchick".

In appearance, this species looks for all the world like a dirty. rather shopworn White-naped Honeyeater. Upper-parts and head a dull olive-brown, with a rather poorly defined buff crescent. Eye patch dull yellow in summer and very pale greenish-blue in winter. Underparts dull creamy brown. Juveniles have a more greenish wash on the head and wings, but lack a defined crescent.

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DAIRY FLAT NOTES

Doug Ross

Despite the drought, the Sewage Farm/Kelly's Swamp/East Basin area was not very good for varieties in the first quarter of 1980. Kelly's Swamp itself became a victim of the drought from late January onwards.

Interesting sightings in the period were:

Little Grebe: from about 4 (January) to about 15 (March)

Hoary-headed Grebe: between 150 and 200 at any time

Australian Pelicans: up to 50 (January) down to about 25 (March)

Sacred Ibis: about 5 constantly (January, February) up to 10 (March)

Straw-necked Ibis: 5 (February) up to 35 (March)

Glossy Ibis: one (3 February)

Yellow-billed Spoonbill: 1 - 28 January; 2 - 30 January; 2 -31 January; 2-16 March; 2-30 March

Royal Spoonbill: 1-20 January; 1-30 January; 1-31 January; 1 - 8 February; 2-27 February; 1 28 - February

1 - 2 March; 1 - 16 March; 5-30 March

Pacific Heron 1 - 26 February; 1 - 2 March; 1 - 4 March; 1 -23 March

Rufous Night Heron: 1-26 January; 1-27 January

Latham's Snipe: 1-4 January; 2 - 30 January; 1-1 February: 1-25 February: 1-27 February 1 - 28 February (a bird camped for several days at the mouth of Jerrabomberra Creek)

Black-fronted Dotterel: flocks of 15-30 visible at any time

Red-kneed Dotterel: 2-29 February: 3 - 16 March; 2-22 March; 1 - 25 March; 4-26 March

Brown Goshawk: single birds seen 9, 12, 22, 25 March

Marsh Harrier: single birds seen 30 January, 30 March

Whistling Kite- 1 - 26 February; 1 - 7 March; 2-25 March. 1- 26 March

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BIRDS OF MOUNT AINSLIE

Don Balfour

During 1979 I endeavoured, for my own interest, to ascertain what birds were to be found in a pre-determined area of Mount Ainslie reasonably accessible from my home. The purpose was no more than that. I was not concerned with populations distribution or breeding.

AREAS OF SEARCH

The search area covered perhaps one-third, possibly a little more, of the total area of the mountain. The area is that enclosed by an imaginary line drawn along the gully which runs in a generally easterly direction up the slope of the mountain from Fisher Street (above the Ainslie shops), to the point where the line meets the Mount Ainslie summit road; then swinging left (keeping the road on the right) and following the road around and down the mountain to the cleared area on the left of the road at the top of the long run down to Fairbairn Avenue; from that cleared area south-east along the ridge to the Aircraft Warning Beacon on the knoll above the Campbell Reservoir; from there down the slope in a north-easterly direction to the edge of the furthest timber line, from where one looks across cleared fields to Majura Lane; along the line of the timber in a northerly direction to the first westward-running fence; along that fence which brings one up the eastern slopes of the mountain to join the dirt service road which runs down the western slopes to the access gate to the Ainslie Tip. The lower boundary is the stormwater channel which runs around the foot of Mount Ainslie.

The area of search thus excludes the main peak of the mountain and the areas facing Reid and Campbell. The excluded area is somewhat different from the area of my search, being steeper, higher and more heavily timbered, with a greater extent of "gully" country. Being less open to the sun for much of the year, and more open to the westerly winds, the area is also generally damper.

SEARCH AREA HABITAT

The area includes a variety of terrain and habitat. There is one short, fairly steep and thickly timbered gully, other gullies of lesser status, timbered slopes of medium vegetation and tree density, a small area on the eastern slope quite difficult of access due to heavy undergrowth, open grassland, and a level timbered area. There are a number of small dams on the eastern side which are served by creeks and gullies after rain. The water level varies according to the rainfall and the

time of the year, but for much of the time the creeks and dams are dry, or nearly so.

Mount Ainslie lies on a north/south axis. The search area is in the northerly extremity. Both sides of the mountain here, the one facing east and the other west, are therefore open to the arc of the sun throughout the year and the country is therefore generally of a "dry" nature.

FREQUENCY, DURATION AND TIMING OF VISITS

Visits were made on average about 5 times each month, with 4 to 5 days between visits. Each visit was of about 4 hours. All visits were made during the forenoon, commencing usually about one hour after sunrise.

RESULTS

So far as Table 2 is concerned, some of the birds included would certainly have been present in every month, or in months where they are not recorded. In this regard it was not possible to cover the whole area on each visit; and for a variety of reasons the time spent in the area during the year was not distributed evenly over the area, although I did endeavour to maintain a reasonable balance. An element of luck therefore operated. I simply recorded what I saw. No doubt some birds were missed altogether.

MOST COMMON BIRD

The bird seen most commonly in all habitats and in greatest numbers was the Grey Fantail, followed probably by the Superb Fairy-wren.

ONCE-ONLY SIGHTINGS (TABLE 2)

The Golden-headed Cisticola, Restless Flycatcher, Crested Shrike-tit, White's Thrush and Grey Butcherbird were seen only on a single occasion, and a single bird in each case. The White-throated Needletail, Fuscous Honeyeater, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo and the Rainbow Bee-eater were each only seen on a single occasion, but there were a number of birds in each case.

Attempts were made on succeeding visits to relocate these birds, but without success. I have no doubt that some of them could have been found had the time been available. But I should add that in some years of wandering over Mount Ainslie I have not before seen a Golden-headed Cisticola, Restless Flycatcher, White's Thrush or Grey Butcherbird.

"ACCIDENTAL" SIGHTINGS

The White-bellied Sea-Eagle was seen circling over the mountain on a dull day of wind and low cloud and was presumably off course from the lake. The Great Cormorant was presumably also off course, but may have had some interest in one of the dams. He also was seen in flight only. One of each species was sighted, and each on one occasion only.

PEAK AND TROUGH

The greatest number of species seen was in the months of October and November - 73 in each month; the lowest number was in the month of April - 47.

One of the 94 species identified during the year, 38 were seen in every month, the remainder (56) as indicated in Table 2.

POPULATIONS AND DISTRIBUTIONS

As already indicated, I was not concerned to establish populations or distributions and my purpose was served by the sighting of a single bird of a particular species.

Nevertheless my impression was that the population of some species was quite small and the distribution of others very restricted.

The birds of small population I would put as follows, the species first mentioned representing the lowest population: Diamond Firetail, Rufous Songlark, Rufous Fantail, Rose Robin, Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper and Southern Whiteface.

Species which I found to be restricted to a single area were the Diamond Firetail, Hooded Robin, Brown Treecreeper, Rufous Songlark and Tree Martin.

I have included under this heading only those species where I saw the birds often enough to be able to form a reasonable judgement as to population and distribution.

TABLE 1:

Birds Present in Every Month of the Year

Galah	Crimson Rosella	Eastern Rosella
Grey Fantail	Scarlet Robin Weebill	Eastern Yellow Robin
Willy Wagtail	Red Wattlebird Pied	Grey Shrike-thrush
Varied Sitella	Currawong Common	Brown Treecreeper
Silvereye	Starling Diamond	Grey Currawong
Australian Raven	Firetail Eastern	Laughing Kookaburra
Speckled Warbler	Spinebill Spotted	Red-browed Firetail
Southern Whiteface	Pardalote Brown	Double-barred Finch
Striated Pardalote	Thornbill	White-winged Chough
Superb Fairy-wren	Australian	Yellow Thornbill
Buff-rumped Thornbill	Magpie-lark	Yellow-rumped
Sulphur-crested	Australian Magpie	Thornbill White-
Cockatoo		throated Treecreeper
Yellow-faced		White-plumed

TABLE 2: Other Birds Present by Month

SPECIES	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Great Cormorant	✓									✓		✓
White-faced Heron	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Maned Duck										✓	✓	
Black-shouldered Kite	✓	✓								✓	✓	
Brown Goshawk										✓	✓	
White-bellied Sea Eagle				✓	✓							
Wedge-tailed Eagle	✓		✓		✓				✓	✓		
Little Eagle										✓		
Australian Hobby							✓			✓		✓
Brown Falcon										✓	✓	
Australian Kestrel	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Painted Button-quail												
Common Bronzewing			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Gang-gang Cockatoo												
Australian King Parrot						✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Red-rumped Parrot												
Pallid Cuckoo												
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo	✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo									✓	✓	✓	✓
Southern Boobook	✓	✓								✓		✓
White-throated Needletail												
Sacred Kingfisher	✓	✓	✓							✓	✓	✓
Rainbow Bee-eater												
Dollarbird	✓	✓										✓

SPECIES	JAN	FEB	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Welcome Swallow		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Tree Martin												
Richard's Pipit		✓										
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-winged Triller												
White's Thrush												
Blackbird				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rose Robin							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Flame Robin						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Hooded Robin	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jacky Winter												
Crested Shrike-tit												
Golden Whistler					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rufous Whistler	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Leaden Flycatcher				✓								
Restless Flycatcher												
Rufous Fantail			✓				✓				✓	✓
Golden-headed Cisticola												
Fufous Songlark	✓	✓	✓									
White-browed Scrubwren	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
White-throated Gerygone	✓	✓	✓									
Noisy Friarbird	✓		✓									
White-eared Honeyeater				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fuscous Honeyeater							✓	✓				
Brown-headed Honeyeater							✓	✓		✓		
White-naped Honeyeater				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				

SPECIES											
Mistletoebird	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Goldfinch	✓	✓	✓								
Olive-backed Oriole	✓	✓									
Dusky Woodswallow	✓										
Grey Butcherbird											
	JAN										
	FEB										
	MARCH										
	APRIL										
	MAY										
	JUNE										
	JULY										
	AUGUST										
	SEPT										
	OCT										
	NOV										
	DEC										

CANBERRA'S CUCKOOS

Richard Schodde

Note: This item is based on a recent "Bird of the Month" talk-Ed Five parasitic cuckoos occur regularly in the Canberra area. All are reasonably easy to identify in adult plumage from the standard field guides but the juvenile plumages can be confusing.

At the simplest level they can be broken down into three size groups:-

1. Large and long-tailed (Pallid Cuckoo):
2. Medium and long-tailed (Brush and Fan-tail Cuckoos)-
3. Small and short-tailed (Shining and Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos)

all have white-barred tails.

The Pallid is the easiest to identify. It is as large as a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and more slender and the tail is about as long as or longer than the body. The overall colour is plain grey, medium on the back and more whitish ventrally. Females average a little more brown on the back than males and may be rather more mottled there. Juveniles are disconcertingly different and mottled heavily with white, black and brown, but nevertheless have the slender shape and graceful flight typical of the adult Pallid Cuckoo. Calls: the male gives the familiar series of rising, whistled notes; females, which rarely call, give a harsh ringing "churr".

Adults of the Fan-tailed and Brush Cuckoos can be difficult to tell apart: both are much the same size, have similarly long tails, are greyish or brownish on the back and dull or pale rufous on the breast. And the shades of the Brush in south-eastern Australia are nowhere near as pallid as some field guides suggest. Both species prefer dense sclerophyllous forests and even rainforest habitats. There are however, two fairly reliable characters - eye ring and call. Fan-tailed Cuckoos have a yellow eye ring and males give a variety of calls, the most frequently heard of which is a descending trill. Brush Cuckoos lack a distinct eye ring and the males have two quite distinctive calls. One is a series of drawn-out whistled notes, each note lower pitch than the preceding; the other is a short series of whistled flourishes, rising in frantic acceleration at the end.

The immatures of the Brush and Fan-tailed Cuckoos are quite different. Those of the Fan-tailed are plain on the back and rufous breasted with fine grey mottlings whereas those of the brush are strongly barred with dusky or black over brown on the back and over grey-white on the breast.

The two small bronze-cuckoos always have a greenish bronze toning to the back. Otherwise they are fairly easy to distinguish. Adults of the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo are a very deep green-bronze on the back with a hint of purplish-red on the crown and are very heavily barred ventrally, the bars meeting broadly right across the breast. They have neither eye stripes nor rufous in the tail. Their call is a repeated, whistled "tui tui tui tui" etc. like that of the Leaden Flycatcher but quicker and shorter and sometimes with a deflection at the end. These, notes are usually heard in spring and early summer from the rather dense dry and wet sclerophyll forests that this cuckoo prefers.

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo is duller on the back and less completely barred on the breast and has two even more distinctive characters: a white brow subtended by a dark line through the eye, and a rufous wash in the outer tail feathers which, nevertheless, is only exposed when the tail is fanned. This cuckoo usually inhabits more open woodlands than the Shining and has a quite different call: a single, long-drawn, descending whistle "seeeeeeeeyuuuuu", repeated fairly regularly from a high exposed perch during spring and summer.

Juvenile Shining Bronze-Cuckoos are duller and more thinly barred than adults and resemble adult Horsfield's except for lacking the light brow, dark eye stripe and rufous in the tail. Juvenile Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos are still duller on the back and quite plain and unbarred ventrally.

Dr R. Schodde, 30 Bamford St. HUGHES. ACT 2605.

COLLARED SPARROWHAWK

Steve Wilson

At 0930 hours on 12 April, 1980 I was driving slowly through Allen Street, Curtin when a predator passed immediately in front of the car and it was seen to be carrying something. It landed on a front lawn and it was identified as an adult male Collared Sparrowhawk while the victim, possibly still alive, was an adult male Blackbird. Fortunately, I had been able to pull up and view the scene from about 5 metres.

When the Sparrowhawk realised it was under close observation it took off with its prey and had no trouble lifting over the house to seek privacy for its breakfast.

Mr S J Wilson, 2 Scott Street, NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604

RARE AND NEW SPECIES IN THE ACT

A NEW ACT SPECIES

Steve Wilson

On Friday 4 July 1980 at about 0900 Dr Steve Russell (newly arrived from sunny, hot, Tucson, Arizona) and I arrived at the National Botanic Gardens and as usual, I headed from the car park to the pool at the bottom of the rainforest gully. Quickly I noticed a familiar call but one I had not heard in Canberra. Recently this call had been heard frequently while on holiday in Merimbula, N.S.W.

Slater describes the normal song as a "reflective three-noted ascending song 'what is it, what is it'". This call has an unusual "zizzing" tone not remarked on in the field guides but this is diagnostic. The birds seen were giving something resembling the first syllable of the call only, a note heard at Merimbula.

Several birds (probably four or five of the species) were feeding in the outer foliage of plants over the pool including Cootamundra Wattle *Acacia baileyana* occasionally hovering to feed from the outermost buds. Features noted were a black sub-terminal tail bar with white spots near the tips of outer feathers and a distinct facial pattern, especially a white eyebrow and forehead.

The birds were the Brown Warbler *Gerygone mouki*, a bird of coastal rainforests reported earlier at Lake George by Mark Clayton and seen by Henry Nix in the damp forests of the eastern slopes of the Tallaganda Range south-west of Braidwood, N.S.W.

Two other small local species hover in outer foliage at times when feeding - the Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata* and the Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*. Neither has white tail markings and both lack the white eyebrow and forehead of the birds observed. The call too was of a distinctive nature and quite unlike that of the Weebill and of the local Thornbills.

The bottom pool in the Gardens and the rain forest gully are ideal habitat for the Brown Warbler. One wonders how long they will remain and indeed how long they have been there as the birds could readily be overlooked by a casual observer.

Mr S J Wilson, 2 Scott Street. NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604

THE BROWN WARBLER

Mark Clayton

Following a phone call from Steve Wilson on Saturday 5 July 1980, where he described a small grey bird with a white eyebrow and white in the outer tail feathers, a visit was made to the National Botanic Gardens the following Sunday morning. The bird that Steve had described seemed to me to be the Brown Warbler *Gerygone mouki* and it was decided that I should try and confirm the sighting.

Steve had seen it at the pool below the rainforest gully near the car park, so at 0900 accompanied by my noisy three year old son, I started to walk slowly up the gully listening for their characteristic call which I know well from the nearby coastal areas. By 0945 nothing new had been seen or heard, particularly as any call was probably drowned out by the numerous honeyeaters, wrens, thornbills and scrubwrens present in the area.

At 1000 I met Kurt Thaler and his daughter near the car park. When Kurt had "finished" his duties as ranger in the gardens we again walked back into the rainforest gully. We were about half way up the gully, opposite the curator's cottage when a bird called immediately beside us in a Cedar Wattle *Acacia elata*. Almost at the same time as I recognised the call a small group of greyish birds began moving rapidly through the surrounding vegetation. The birds came to within a metre or so of us and Kurt commented on the bold white superciliary stripe. The call was a very insect like "which-it, which-it". All together there appeared to be at least four, and probably six, birds moving around and feeding in a manner that is again characteristic - rapid hovering at the ends of branches, then diving into cover only to repeat the performance again. The birds were watched for approximately 10 minutes at varying distances and heights before they moved away. They can definitely be confirmed as Brown Warblers.

I should add that about two weeks previous to this sighting I was working on the top of Brown Mountain near Cooma and had the opportunity then to see this species at close range. From a record I had at Lake George (see CBN 4:5,6) and these newer records, it would appear that the Brown Warbler is more common in the "high country" than previously realised.

Mr M Clayton, 81 Maribyrnong Avenue, KALEEN, ACT, 2617

SPANGLED DRONGO SIGHTING

Rosemary Kennemore

On Thursday, 24 April, 1980. I was walking from my home in Aranda to Jamison shopping centre. The weather was calm clear and sunny. I took a route via the walkway between Bandjalong Crescent and Bindaga Street. This walkway runs at right angles between the two streets and passes between the gardens of four houses. Walking in a roughly westerly direction, the two gardens on the right are heavily planted with trees and shrubs while the two on the left have few. In the westernmost garden on the left, there is one very large eucalypt. To the trunk of the tree, the present owners have attached a yellow plastic cord as a washing line. The line stretches in two directions from roughly the centre of its length at the tree trunk to the boundary fence at the side of the walkway. My attention was drawn to this line by the noise and movements of a Willie Wagtail. The Wagtail was attempting to dislodge a much larger bird perched on one section of the line. I stopped and stood watching for what I estimate to be at least two or three minutes and had a clear, uninterrupted view of both birds. The larger bird appeared to have uniformly black or very dark feathers with a green sheen on the wing area. It had a bright red eye and a tail with a fork like the tail of a fish. The feathers in this area were not tapered to a point like the tail of a swallow but were rounded. The bird was a good deal larger than a Starling but smaller than a Magpie. It had a fairly short, thick beak. At no time could I see any 'spangles' either on the head or the it make any sound. My observation ended when the bird flew down into the garden further away from and behind the fence.

My only previous sighting of a Spangled Drongo was in 1978 at Trial Bay Historic Site, near Kempsey, N.S.W. On that occasion, my husband and I saw the Drongo sitting on an exposed branch of a stunted tree which protruded from thick, low-growing coastal heath beside a path. We had a copy of Slater's Field Guide to Australian Birds with us and were able to identify it while we stood and watched it. On that occasion also, the 'spangles' were not seen.

Mrs P. Kennemore, 3 Gingana Street, ARANDA, ACT 2614.

SIGHTINGS OF A BUFF-BANDED RAIL AND BAR-TAILED GODWIT

Richard Mason

a. A single Buff-banded Rail *Rallus philippensis* was clearly seen in the afternoon of 10 September 1979 at 1400 and again at 1645. The location was in the ANU campus, the west bank of Sullivan's Creek below Ward Road bridge and no more than a few yards from the surrounds of Burgmann College. The following morning which was marked by heavy rain, I sat in my car in the College car-park, and saw the bird frequently between 1030 and 1300. In between the spells of rain, it would emerge from the rushes growing along the creek, in order to forage up and along the grassy bank between the creek and the road leading to the car-park. It was not particularly nervous, but when it did decide to take shelter in the rushes for any reason, it could move very quickly indeed. I realised, after making the positive identification on these dates, that I had in all probability seen the bird several times before, the first of these occasions being in August. Subsequent checks and walks in the area in October and November failed to reveal it. There is an earlier report (CBN, Vol 2, No 9) of a Buff-banded Rail having been seen at the ANU. I wonder if this sighting, too, was in the Sullivan's Creek area.

b. A solitary Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* was closely and clearly seen on the shore of Lake Burley Griffin, between the mouth of Sullivan's Creek and the grounds of Canberra Hospital, just before 1800 on 19 November 1979. The bird was feeding along the water-line. It allowed me to get very close to it, only flying a few yards at a time, and though it seemed very hungry, it did not appear to be injured. I am very familiar with this species as a result of seeing it frequently on the south coast at Wallaga Lake and at the Bermagui River estuary, both places where small flocks of Godwits are nearly always to be found from late winter to late summer, and I am certain of the identification in this case.

Dr R.H.P Mason, 26 Jansz Crescent, GRIFFITH, ACT, 2603

BAR-TAILED GODWIT AT TAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

David E Pfanner

A Bar-tailed Godwit was observed probing in the grass near the Captain Cook Memorial globe below Exhibition Point on the afternoon of 26 November at 1715. The same bird was there again the next morning at 0900. On both occasions the Bar-tailed Godwit was feeding amidst a group of Silver Gulls and could be observed closely.

The extremely long bill was slightly curved upwards, the upper half being yellow and the lower half black. The darker brown of the back was confined largely to a broad band down the middle shading off into lighter flanks and a white belly. Compared with the Bar-tailed Godwit pictured on Plate XIII, P 174 of Frith's 'Birds in the Australian High Country', the bill was more yellow near the head, there was more contrast between the darker back and lighter breast and belly, and a white stripe above the eye was more prominent.

Frith, in the work cited above, describes the Bar-tailed Godwit as a very rare migrant in this area. The 'Field List of the Birds of Canberra and District' (Second Edition, 1971) records a sighting at Lake Bathurst in 1962 but says the bird has not been recorded in the ACT 'Canberra Bird Notes' in July 1979, contains the following reference to the Bar-tailed Godwit: 'The first record of this species was reported on 17 December 1972 (CBN, Vol 2, No 5, P 19). There have been no other records.'

It is encouraging to know that the Bar-tailed Godwit may now be finding our area an attractive stop-over on its migratory route.

Dr D.E. Pfanner, 33 Elliott, CAMPBELL, ACT, 2601

C.O.G. DISPLAY

Mark Clayton

Each year the Society for Growing Australian Plants holds an exhibition of native plants in Canberra and last year C.O.G. staged a display at the exhibition.

Again this year the S.G.A.P. show will be staged and C.O.G. will be there; the dates are 25 and 26 October and the location is the large pavilion not far from the Showground's entrance. Anyone interested in native plants and in birds is urged to attend. The floral displays are well worth seeing and lots of plants are for sale.

OUT AND ABOUT

G Tibicen

On 1 January 1977 the Atlas of Australian Birds commenced its five year survey of the bird fauna of Australia. The response has been far better than most people would have believed possible. However, with less than eighteen months left until the Atlas finishes there is still a need for observers, especially those prepared to travel to local areas and look for breeding birds during the breeding season. Because the observations of the common species are far more important than those of occasional rarity this is an activity that even the beginner can help with. If you want further details either write to the Atlas headquarters at 21 Gladstone Street. Moonee Ponds, VIC, 3039. or phone Cedric Rear (the local Regional Organiser) at home on 583169.

Also, help is required with the transcription of historical lists that are held at the National Library. If you are prepared to assist please give Cedric a ring.

Quite often people ask me about nest boxes. I am afraid my experience is very limited and cannot help beyond the repetition of much hearsay. However if you want some facts the Bird Observers Club have a leaflet which is available from them at PO Box 185, Nunawading. VIC, 3131. Please enclose two 22 cent stamps.

Another address that is worth making a note of is the Gould League of Victoria, Box 446 PO. Prahran, VIC, 3181. They have some excellent educational material for young children at very reasonable prices.

If you are a teacher or a parent with young children you could do far worse than drop them a line and ask for their price list. Their material includes posters (available at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve), work books and guide books for teachers.

In the July newsletter of the Australian Conservation Foundation, there was a news item about the declaration of a new 1400 hectare National Park on Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean- Christmas Island is of course famous as the only nesting place of the Abbott's Booby. However, the news item goes on to say that there is concern about the size of the park as it will not secure the future of Abbott's Booby. It seems funny that Mr Thomson (the Federal Minister for Science and the Environment)

can declare a National Park that will not fulfil the major purpose of a National Park on Christmas Island (ie. preserve its unique fauna). Perhaps I have it wrong and somebody can enlighten me?

A recent item which caught my eye in the news media was the discovery of some Kakapos or Owl Parrots on Stewart Island (the little island just south of New Zealand's South Island). Apparently one female was identified amongst the birds found so perhaps the Kakapo may yet survive as a species.

The Royal Australasian Ornithologist's Union has opened a bird observatory at Rotamah Island which is near Bairnsdale in Gippsland. A bird observatory is a place where courses are held on various aspects of bird-watching or where a person can go to stay for a night (or several) and meet other bird watchers. Further details of the observatory can be obtained from The Warden, Rotamah Island Bird Observatory, PO Box 75, Paynesville. VIC, 3880, or telephone (051) 566 398. At present the cost is \$10.00 per day, all meals provided. All that a visitor has to take are sheets and towels.

How long does a bird live? This is a question I am often asked and can never accurately answer. So here are some facts to answer the question.

The oldest reported bird in the Australian Bird Banding Scheme is an Australian Magpie. It was colour banded on 13 September 1956 by Dr Robert Carrick whilst he was carrying out his studies on Magpies. The bird was banded as an 'Adult Female' and since then has been recaptured and sighted many times. It was eventually found cold and unable to fly on 12 June 1980. The bird was 23 years 9 months and 13 days old plus at least the two years it takes to develop adult plumage.

The reason that her history is so well known is that the whole of her adult life was spent in one territory which included the office of the Bird Banding Scheme! Even when found sick she was only 100 yards from the Banding Office!

At last report the bird was recovering slowly (but noisily - especially first thing in the morning) in the home of the Secretary of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme.

And finally, one for those curious people who erroneously believe that seabirds are proper birds:

A few months ago one of the Service Stations in Civic was selling 'CHEAP PETREL,'. I presume there is a simple process known only to initiates in the Australian Seabird Group by which these animals (I refuse to call them birds) can be rendered down to produce oil to run your car!

FIELD INSECTS AND BIRDS

Doug Ross

The Cattle Egret, *Ardeola ibis*, is so named from its attendance on cattle which, as they graze, put up insects on which the birds feed. I have seen flocks of the Common Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris* "working" grazing cattle in much the same way.

Another possible instance of birds using grazing cattle as beaters for insects was seen on the irrigated pastures between the Dairy Flat sewage farm and the Molonglo on 27 January 1980.

Immediately above a fairly tight group of about 100 cattle there was what I can only call a column of about 100 Welcome Swallows, *Hirundo neoxena*, vigorously hunting for insects. The column stayed pretty well within the area defined by the group of cattle: there were few lateral movements out of the area but considerable vertical movement. (Occasional white flashes suggested that among the swallows there were a few martins: whether Tree or Fairy I could not see.)

The observation lasted about 15 minutes: birds were already feeding when I arrived and had not finished when I left.

It may have been no more than coincidence that there happened to be a concentration of suitable insects above the cattle at that time. The other possibility was that the cattle had put up a number of smaller insects and that the swallows and martins took advantage of the situation. The observation prompts another question. One seems automatically to associate the Cattle Egret with cattle but sheep and horses also put insects up. I have yet to see Cattle Egrets "working" grazing sheep or horses. Is it that, in its original sources, the Cattle Egret has worked only cattle (plus, perhaps, corvids) and has not been long enough in Australia to learn that sheep and horses could be equally efficient beaters?

Mr A D Ross 64 Sprent Street NARRABUNDAH ACT 2604

FOLIAGE BATHING IN THE BROWN THORNBILL AND SPANGLED DRONGO

Tony Stokes

At 0845 hours on 5 August, 1979 I saw a Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla* fluttering repeatedly onto the broad leaves of a Blanket-leaf tree *Bedfordia saliana* on New Chums Road in the Brindabella Ranges near Canberra. It subsequently ruffled and preened below the canopy of the same tree. The temperature had been measured 1-1/2 hours previously at minus 2°C and there was a heavy frost. Since the tree was still in the shade, conditions would not have been much warmer at the time of observation. Vallenga (1965) also refers to some birds bathing in very cold weather.

Similarly, at 0800 hours on 6 May, 1979 I saw two Spangled Drongos *Dicrurus hottentottus* fluttering among large pinnately-compound leaves of a tree on the campus of the James Cook University of North Queensland at Townsville. After several such flutters they flew to a branch to preen their thoroughly wet plumage.

Reference: Vallenga, P.E. 1965. "The Bathing of Birds", Aust Bird Watcher, 2:144-146.

Mr T Stokes, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, Box 636, Canberra City, ACT.

A DOLLARBIRD STORY

Kay Anway

From 1830 to 1900 hours on 20 January 1980, I observed an immature Dollarbird on a topmost dead branch of a eucalyptus tree in my back yard. Looking up I saw an adult feeding one young bird. When I went to get my binoculars, the adult flew away and did not return. The young one, however, perched on a branch with a very odd looking thing in its beak. It proved to be a ring-pull from the top of a drink can. The circle was prominent at one end, and the little curled up bit of aluminium was protruding out the other end of its beak. It sat for many minutes, not trying to dislodge, or swallow or play with the ring-pull.

Once the bird flew to another tree and made a slight noise, still with the ring-pull. Are Dollarbirds collectors of shiny objects? Did the adult bird give this object to its young one? Not a very nutritious diet. Perhaps the Dollarbirds are joining the anti-litter campaign and are helping keep Australia beautiful!!!

Ms K. Anway, 10 Gingana Place, ARANDA ACT 2614

ODD BEHAVIOUR OF A LITTLE BUTTON-QUAIL

John Penhallurick

During the 1980 Canberra Day weekend, Cedric Rear and I made a trip to a property north of Wanaaring, N.S.W. The prolonged drought had badly affected bird numbers, but towards evening of Friday 14 March, we found quite a number of birds in a small open area bordered by shrubs and stunted trees east of the dry Cuttaburra Channel. Birds seen here included Red-backed Kingfisher, Crested Bellbird, Brown Treecreeper, Black-faced Woodswallow and Pied Butcherbird.

While watching a male Crested Bellbird hopping along the ground, I noticed a male Little Button-quail (*Turnix velox*). Diagnostic were the pale underside, lack of spotting or barring on the side of the neck, but above all, its tiny size.

It took off and flew about twenty metres to the base of some shrubs. As I approached the spot, I noticed what seemed to be a dead bird, lying on its back with its legs in the air. I did not make any connection with the quail, but as I bent to pick up the corpse it hopped up and flew off out of sight among some bushes. It was the quail.

I have asked several birdwatchers familiar with quail but none of them had encountered such behaviour. Is playing dead a regular defence mechanism of the species? Or was the bird weakened by the drought, momentarily exhausted by its first flight? Its otherwise lively behaviour does not fit in with the latter possibility.

Mr J Penhallurick, 86 Bingley Crescent, FRASER ACT 2615

ODD OBSERVATIONS

BLACK KITE NEAR CANBERRA

Penny Olsen

A Black Kite *Milvus migrans* was seen on the ACT side of the Gundaroo Road at 1100 hours on 5 February 1980. It was flying about 3 metres above the road, crossing back and forth, apparently catching grasshoppers by swooping down to snatch them just above the ground and eating them on the wing. Occasionally it dropped to the ground to catch and eat grasshoppers. The Kite was undisturbed by my car as I approached and watched it catch 6 insects (grasshoppers?), 2 on the ground and 4 in the air. As I left it continued its way up the road.

BLACK FALCONS NEAR SUTTON

Penny and Gerry Olsen

A Black Falcon *Falco subniger* (female by size) was seen crossing the Gundaroo Road (in the ACT) at 1700 hours on 14 March. 1980. As it glided low across the tree tops and landed in a tree, two Australian Magpies, *Gymnorhina tibicen* mobbed it. They appeared to have little effect on the falcon.

On 25 December. 1979 at 1800 hours we were visiting the nest of a pair of Brown Goshawks, *Accipiter fasciatus*, to measure the nestlings. As we approached the nest tree, the female flew out toward us "ipip-ing" in defence as she usually did. A Black Falcon (male by size) pursuing a flock of common Starlings, *Sturnus Vulgaris*, through this open woodland interrupted the chase to swoop at the female Goshawk. She retreated and landed on a tree while the Black Falcon resumed its pursuit of the Starlings. A Black Falcon (male by size) was also seen flying across the paddocks after Starlings in this same area on 1 December 1979.

Mr and Mrs J. Olsen, R.M.B. 1705, Read Road. SUTTON. N.S.W. 2620

"ANTING" BY BIRDS IN CANBERRA

F H Ordish

In a south Canberra suburb on 18 April, 1980 I noticed a mixed group of six Common Starlings and eight Common Mynahs behaving in a peculiarly excited and energetic manner on the ground. I thought, at first glance, that the birds were bathing in wet grass on the sloping ground but when I stopped my car close by I observed quite clearly, from a distance of only three metres, that all birds were very actively "anting". Dozens of large brown sugar ants had emerged from their holes and each bird was holding ant after ant in its beak and vigorously rubbing the squirming insects thoroughly through its wing feathers, into its "wing-pits", through its tail feathers and onto its breast.

After the birds flew away, I found on the site numerous mutilated, dead and dying large brown sugar ants which emitted a strong formic acid smell at close quarters. It would certainly appear that the Starlings and Mynahs were following a routine to rid themselves of feather and/or skin parasites.

There was no suggestion of any courtship behaviour in the birds' agitated performance.

Mr F H Ordish, 13 Baudin Street FORREST ACT 2603

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
ROUND PEGS IN ROUND HOLES

Recently a most interesting evening was arranged at the home of Mr and Mrs Steve Wilson to gather together people who had been involved in the New Chums Road bird-banding scheme over the last 10 years for the principal purpose of meeting ornithologist Steve Russell, of the University of Arizona. Steve Russell is in Canberra for some months to analyse all the many pieces of information so painstakingly recorded by so many bird lovers.

It was indeed a treat to be included in the party to meet him and to realise that at last something was to come of all those figures.

However the most impressive thing about the evening, to my mind, was the presence of various young men who had been in their early teens when Gerald and I helped with the banding more than 10 years ago. Today they are doing post-graduate work on, or are employed in wild-life or environmental jobs. Their 8-hours a day are spent in satisfying work, they are brimming over with enthusiasm and look relaxed and happy.

And all this due to their youthful taste for tramping about the Brindabellas at 0400 in any weather in the company of that father of bird-banders, Steve Wilson, whose understanding and recognition of ability eased them along the path to being round pegs in round holes.

Mrs S Horey. PO Box 147, MORUYA, NSW, 2537.

UP AND AWAY

Eric Andrew

Our birds, as well as our airline, seem to have adopted the "Up and Away" slogan.

Recently while flying in a light aircraft from Broken Hill to Tibooburra, NSW, I observed a Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*, flying south at an altitude of 2,100 m. Later on the same flight a flock of Australian Pelicans. *Pelecanus conspicillatus*, was observed also flying south at an altitude of 2700 metres. On both occasions the altitude was checked against the altimeter of the aircraft.

As well as "getting up" our pelicans are "getting away". From Guam comes a report of about 150 arriving on the island of Palau in the Caroline Islands and causing quite a stir amongst local residents.

Larger than any bird ever occurring in Micronesia, this sudden appearance caused a flood of terror-ridden rumours, including the story of one bird with a 6 metre wing-spread; the story that they could carry ten sacks of rice in their pouches; that they were feasting on all the fish in Palau's reefs and lagoons, and appetites still unsatisfied, eating babies.

Eventually sanity prevailed but not before more than twenty birds had been shot.

Mr E Andrew, 2 Cobar Place FISHER ACT 2611

ODD OBS

BLACK FALCON

Jerry and Penny Olsen

At 1245 hours on 10 August 1980, a male Black Falcon *Falco subniger* flew over our house near Sutton at an altitude of about 100 metres. The bird flew rapidly and directly from the north towards Canberra. This is an unusual time of year to see a Black Falcon near Canberra as they are now starting to breed in the inland; perhaps the bird is breeding locally.

A BUTTERFLY TAKING SPARROW

Doug Ross

On 24 November 1979, I was attracted by the unfamiliar appearance of a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) in Kingston Shopping Centre. Closer inspection showed that the unfamiliarity was due to the sparrow's having a large butterfly in its beak.

The bird was unable to cope with the insect which escaped and, in flying off, revealed a wing spread of about 5 cms. The sparrow pursued the butterfly for about 100 metres, the insect weaving in and out of cars by way of evasion tactics and the bird unsuccessfully trying to follow course and retake its prey. The bird was determined in its pursuit but was unable to brake and swerve quickly enough.

As far as I can recall, this is the first occasion on which I have seen a House Sparrow either with a large insect or in flight pursuit of such an insect.

Mr A D Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, ACT. 2604

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. The subscription rate is: single, \$5.00; family, \$7.00, both with one copy.

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