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W.T. Cooper 79.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

INTRODUCED SPECIES REVISITED

But for the invitation in your editorial (CBN, Vol 7, No 3, July 1982), I should have hesitated over this letter.

What I take issue with is the suggested list of potential 'eradicates' in the penultimate paragraph. Its orders of priority are askew. I do not disagree about the Common Mynah, a loathsome, successful and, therefore, dangerous species. The Mallards, I understand, are progressively being taken out already. But European Greenfinch and Nutmeg Mannikin!

There were 30 or so greenfinches the last time I saw them together. They are confined to a very small area, and have been for years; they appear incapable of a break-out. Anyone who does not know precisely where to look would never personally be aware of their existence. (That is my own position as regards the mannikins.)

The impact of 30 greenfinches on the environment would be negligible, so why pick on them (and the mannikins), passing over real villains like House Sparrow, Common Starling, Rock Dove, European Goldfinch and, I have to say it, Blackbird? Your heart surely cannot be tender towards them, as mine is towards greenfinches (and blackbirds). I suspect a failure of the will (or indulgence in displacement activity), much as police forces are sometimes said to harry the small fry because the Mr Bigs are too powerful or too hot to touch. One out, all out is my motto and, if starlings cannot be eradicated, greenfinches should also stay.

PS: I cannot resist setting another (introduced) hare running. Assume that the very existence of the ACT's native avifauna is to be defended against outside interferences. That immediately raises the question: the avifauna of which particular historical horizon? The ACT is no longer what it was before 'old' Canberra came into existence, and the Belconnen, Woden and Wanniassa developments have further transformed both the environment and its avifauna. Consider the Pied Currawong, now permanently resident within the city in large numbers. It is certainly destructive of native sbbs in whose eggs and fledglings it finds a ready-made supply of food. Should it be eliminated (or controlled) as a threatening species, even though some 'threatened' species themselves -nay have been helped to multiply by the city's development?

As I suggested in my earlier letter, once man interferes on any scale, things start to shift and any process of counter-interference is unlikely to restore the status quo ante. Indeed, it can make a bad case worse. Dangers of hybridisation apart, the only sensible and realistic attitude seems to be to accept what has happened in urban areas but police rural, park and wilderness areas. I regard Kelly's Swamp (where the greenfinches are) as urban.

A D Ross, 64 Sprent Street, NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604

ODD OBS

GULL BILLED TERN AT LAKE BATHURST

Henry Nix

During a bi-monthly water-bird census at Lake Bathurst east of Lake George, Alison Rowell and I observed a robust, dark-billed tern flying across the easternmost water body of The Morass. Tentatively identified as a Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, this was confirmed when two birds were observed at close quarters, sweeping and then plummeting into short herbage in a dry water basin to snatch up small grasshoppers. Both birds were in breeding plumage, with prominent black caps. Although not uncommon on the western slopes and plains inland from Canberra this would appear to be only the third record for the region. The first was of a single bird, first observed on 17 September 1972 at Kelly's Swamp and remaining present for just a few days; the second was also of a single bird, in the same location, on 29 October 1979. Our observation of two birds, in breeding plumage, was on 13 December 1981.

CICADABIRD ON MT AINSLIE

Bryan Fitzgerald

At 8.00 am on 8 November 1982, a single male Cicadabird *Coracina tenuirostris*, was observed feeding but not calling, in Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* on the south-western slopes of Mt Ainslie. It was just outside suburbia and was under observation for a short period as it foraged in the upper foliage of several trees. A search later in the morning in the same area failed to re-locate it, perhaps because it had moved on to the Brindabella Ranges where this species is usually to be seen or heard in the summer months.

OBSERVATIONS OF THORNBILLS, WEEBILL AND SCRUB WREN
IN RED HILL GARDEN

Alan Cowan

The following is the result of one year's sightings of the Thornbill-Weebill-Scrub Wren group in my garden during 1981.

Before I started looking, I didn't think many Striated Thornbills *Acanthiza lineata* occurred in my garden. However, it soon became clear that Striated Thornbills were far commoner than Brown Thornbills *Acanthiza pusilla*.

I did not do a daily search but merely recorded all sightings, often having my attention drawn by calls. It soon became a simple matter to recognise the birds by call.

It was noticeable that Striated Thornbills always occurred in parties of up to 10 or more birds whereas the Brown Thornbill was almost always solitary or in a pair. Mixed flocks occurred, but seemed loosely-knit, and the Brown Thornbills usually kept apart. The Striated Thornbill was much more readily 'squeaked up' and they will come extremely close.

The number of days on which a species was seen often included several separate sightings within a day.

Brown Thornbill *Acanthiza pusilla*: seen in every month except May, June and September, 19 days on which seen.

Striated Thornbill *Acanthiza lineata*: seen in every month except August, October and November, 25 days on which seen.

Yellow Thornbill *Acanthiza nana*: seen only once in September. In previous years I have seen them more often.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*: seen in January, February, March, June and July, seen on only 8 days, to my surprise.

Weebill *Smicrornis brevirostris*: The major change has been the absence for at least two years of this bird from my garden; a few years ago its call seemed to be never-ceasing. One of the Rangers in the Botanic Gardens told me they seemed to have disappeared from there too; is this a general experience?

White-browed Scrub Wren *Sericornis frontalis*: since my native garden matured and developed a good under-story and litter, this species has made frequent appearances and I believe they breed here. I recorded them in January, February, September and December. I do not know of any other garden sightings in Canberra.

A Cowan, 6A Vancouver Street, RED HILL, ACT, 2603

PROPOSED MUSK DUCK STUDY GROUP

Doug Ross and Chris Davey

We propose pooling our resources to ascertain and publish further facts about the numbers, locations and habits of Musk Duck *Biziura lobata* in the Canberra area.

Such a study may have a touristic as well as an ornithological value. Consents-by visitors to Doug Ross on seeing male Musk Ducks displaying suggest that the duck might be Canberra's response to the Tibetan Yeti (the Unspeakable Musk Duck, or *Biziura lobata ineffabilis*).

Chris Davey covers the Ginninderra area and Doug Ross Lake Burley Griffin upstream of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge, plus the Jerrabomberra Wetlands and Sewage Farm area. That leaves a great stretch of Lake Burley Griffin uncovered, and in recent years, this area appears to have seen most of the excitement.

We hope to supplement our own observations with material drawn from COG's regular water bird surveys and the Lake Ecology Laboratory's counts (which, being done from a boat, should be particularly helpful). We would, however, like to enlist further people to cover the central and western areas of Lake Burley Griffin more frequently, not only for numbers but also for such things as male/female ratios, display frequency, breeding and so on. Reports of sightings on a casual basis would also be welcome.

Would anyone willing to help please contact Doug Ross on 95-6041 (H) or 63-3823 (W), or Chris Davey on 54-6324 (H) or 41-1211 (W).

A D Ross, 64 Sprent Street, NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604 C
Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, HOLT, ACT, 2615

IMPORTANT: PERSONAL LIABILITY!

Due to changes in underwriting policy our insurers have declined to renew the public liability policy for the Group. It therefore behoves all members of COG, especially those who organise activities, to ensure that their personal liability insurance is up to date.

SOME MOUNT AINSLIE OBSERVATIONS

Glossy Black Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus lathami*

Bryan Fitzgerald and Alastair Morrison

The Mount Ainslie/Majura Ridge supports a considerable amount of *Casuarina stricta*, one of the Glossy Black Cockatoo's main food sources. It would appear that the species may be a regular visitor to the area.

Three birds, a male and two females, were seen by Jenny Ruxton and her father from the walking trail near the summit of Mount Ainslie on 10 March 1982.

More were seen by Morrison on the western slope above the ACTEA substation on 9 April 1983. They were subsequently seen by Fitzgerald and several of her members of COG, usually not more than 6 birds. The last observation by Fitzgerald was on 3 May 1983 of a flock of 14. All birds seen were on the western slope but there were indications that they had also been feeding in the considerable growth of *Casuarina* on the ridge top north of the road to the summit.

Feeding birds leave a considerable amount of cone litter. The litter (old cones, part-eaten cones and ripped-off segments) are initially an oatmeal colour but quickly change to a reddish shade. The birds are selective feeders, confining themselves to fully developed but green *Casuarina* cones. The actual seeds are minute. The many old cones to be seen on the *Casuarinas* remain untouched. The heavy work involved is the obvious explanation for the massive bills of the species. Fitzgerald was able to hear them dismembering cones at a range of about 80 paces. They are tame but rather quiet birds and despite their large size can easily escape attention.

Bryan Fitzgerald, 36 Winnecke Street, AINSLIE, ACT, 2602

Alastair Morrison, 26 Canning Street, AINSLIE, ACT, 2602

ODD OBS

DROUGHT EFFECT?

Delia Johnson

Male Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* observed at Durras Lake, south coast of New South Wales, 21 November 1982.

AN UNUSUAL BEACH WASHED PETREL

Dr L Dennis and Dr P Bolger

The first weekend of November 1981 we found the remains of a petrel on the beach by the Tilba Tilba cemetery though not in good condition the carcass was obviously something different; its size alone was enough to distinguish it from the muttonbird relics which are a constant and common occurrence on these beaches near to their breeding grounds. All of the plumage appeared to be almost uniformly dark, there was no sign of a white feather. The bill was massive and pale, horn-coloured, with darker, greyish shadings in the nasal grooves and at the tip. The side plates of the bill were uniformly pale, close to white, but unfortunately in carrying the bundle back to base, these side plates were displaced and lost.

When measurements were checked with information in the literature a tentative identification of Westland Petrel *Procellaria westlandica* was made. If so this would have been one of the few records of this species on the shores of this continent. A second opinion seemed to be called for and the bedraggled remains were delivered to Dr G Van Tets at CSIRO Wildlife.

The conclusion was contrary to ours, with such a poor specimen identity was difficult to establish. It was most probably a White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* without a white chin. Strangely, our specimen was probably the third published record from Australian shores, though the birds are present in large numbers in the surrounding ocean areas.

We accepted the invitation to let the pieces remain in the Wildlife Collection where they will be available for examination and reference. The specimen is held as a skeleton and identified as *Procellaria aequinoctialis*. We are grateful to those who took time to help us in our identification problem.

L Dennis and P Bolger, c/- 100 Hope tow Circuit, YARRALUMLA, ACT, 2600

EDITOR'S NOTE: If this specimen is in fact a White-chinned Petrel it would be difficult to precisely determine the status of this record in terms of the numbers of previous published records. The reason for this is that although it is indeed most unusual for a beach-bashed specimen to be

collected, the species is regularly observed in the Great Australian Bight and Bass Strait.

The separation of the White-chinned Petrel, a rare but regularly observed winter visitor to NSW offshore waters, from the very rare Westland Petrel is very difficult at sea unless the White-chinned Petrel is an individual with a white chin. In the hand, the size range of the two species completely overlaps. A representative collection of skeletons is needed in the CSIRO Wildlife Collection for positive identification of the skeletal remains mentioned in this article.

ODD OBS

WELCOME SWALLOW: FEEDING OF YOUNG ON THE WING

Doug Ross

Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxena* raised a brood of three young under the eaves of the Lake Ecology Laboratory building this year. While talking to the Ranger on 25 October 1982, I observed the young perching on a wire fence at a height of about 2 metres. The parents were hunting for insects in front of the building. From time to time, a parent - no doubt having filled its beak - would fly close to the fence and call, whereupon one of the young would take off and meet the parent breast to breast, in mid air, both birds 'hovering' for a second or two and 'kissing' - the kiss presumably being the act of food transfer.

I have often enough seen Welcome Swallow parents taking food to the nest but not feeding their young on the wing. I add that in this case the young appeared to be strong and, given the hovering, capable flyers.

WHITE-THROATED NIGHTJAR IN CANBERRA

Bryan Fitzgerald

Early on Tuesday 8 March 1983, an immature injured White-throated Nightjar *Caprimulgus mystacalis* was found in a garden on the foothills of Mt Ainslie near the edge of the suburban area. Injuries suggested that the nightjar had been attacked by an owl or cat. It was injured beyond recovery and is now awaiting preparation for the National Wildlife Collection at CSIRO Wildlife.

BLACK SWAN BREEDING IN LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN AREA:
SECOND HALF OF 1982
Doug Ross

It must be quite a time since three broods of Black Swan *Cygnus stratus* were last visible in the Lake Burley Griffin area all at the one time.

The first brood, of five, hatched near Scrivener Dam about 16/17 August 1982 (Lake Ecology Laboratory report). Reduced to four, the cygnets and both parents have since been sighted frequently on the lower stretches of Jerrabomberra Creek and East Basin.

The second brood, again of five, was hatched in the reed beds of Kelly's Swamp about 6 October. Both parents and the five cygnets have since regularly been seen on the Swamp.

The third brood, of five again, hatched about 18 October, towards the downstream end of the Lake (Lake Ecology Laboratory report).

A D Ross, 64 Sprent Street, NARRABUNDAH, ACT, 2604

ODD OBS

A BLACK KITE AT ALBION PARK

Tony Stokes

Three hours before sundown on 28 January 1983 I was driving into Albion Park from Robertson, NSW, when an unusual hawk glided over the road about 5 km from the town.

From its uniform dark colouration, forked tail and swivel-tail action it appeared to be a Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, a species I was familiar with in northern Australia. This was confirmed after I stopped and inspected the bird more closely as it moved back and forth not far above me.

Morris et al (1981) state that most records of Black Kite from coastal New South Wales occur during inland drought and this was another instance.

Reference

Morris, A K, A R McGill and G Holmes, 1981, *Handlist of Birds in New South Vales*, Sydney, New South Wales Field Ornithologists Club.

BOOBOOK MEAL

Bryan Fitzgerald

At 8.30 pm on 11 March 1983, a strange squeaking bird-like noise was heard in a large Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* in my backyard which backs onto the Mt Ainslie foothills. When I returned with a powerful torch and binoculars 8 x 30 all was silent but the torch picked up a Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* facing the observer about 10 metres above the ground standing on a 'platform' where three branches joined. It was tearing at a bird held in its talons. The prey's breast was also facing the observer and was rufous, throat white with a dark border and slate grey wings - a male Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*. A social engagement prevented further observation of the activity. Feathers found on the ground below next day were consistent with the male Rufous Whistler identification.

B Fitzgerald, 36 Winnecke Street, AINSLIE, ACT, 2602

HOBBIES HAWKING

Henry Nix

During the summer school vacation period I commute to Kioloa, South Coast for weekends. On a number of occasions I had glimpses of an Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* in swift, slicing flight in and around the tall old trees in the park in the centre of Braidwood. On Sunday evening, 16 January, I stopped for coffee at about 8.30 pm and noted a Hobby slicing about in tight circles over the tree-tops. Closer inspection revealed a pair of Hobbies taking large flying insects. 'Hawking' for insects usually refers to a sally and snap procedure with the bird returning to a perch. In this case a more appropriate term would be 'swifiting' and, indeed a small party of White-throated Needletails *Hirundapus caudacutus* (or Spine-tailed Swifts to you and I) joined the Hobbies on the hilltop for a brief period. Apart from size and the method of taking prey, the two species showed much similarity in their scissoring flight and slicing glides in tight circles. The Hobbies remained aloft for 10 minutes at a time and captured prey on average about every 20 seconds, with the talons jack-knifed forward and the prey swiftly transferred to the beak. Because of cloud on the western horizon it was quite dark, but street-lighting probably both attracted insects and aided Hobbies. They were still hard at it when I left.

H A Nix, 22 Syme Crescent, O'CONNOR, ACT, 2601

THE GAPE OF THE WHITE-PLUMED HONEYEATER

E Metcalf

I have been watching the coming and going of the Honeyeaters in my garden for the last three years, and had noted and reported in COG Bird Notes the gape of the Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscus* (CBN, Vol 6, No 7, April 1981).

On 16 April 1982, I saw in my garden a group of about a dozen White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus* feeding and bathing in the bird-bath. Half of them had yellow beaks and gape. In some, the colour was most pronounced, the colour of the head and face extending to the throat. In others, the colour was more sombre, more like that of the Fuscous Honeyeater. Others were possessed of the usual black beak.

This visitation continued for six days. Then I saw less of them until 30 April 1982 when the Fuscous Honeyeaters arrived, and I was able to compare the two species on the spot. (I was also able to discern, for the first time, the yellow eye-ring of the new arrivals as distinct from the absence of the ring in the White-plumed.)

E C Metcalf, Thorn Cottage, 11 Peel Street, O'CONNOR, ACT, 2601

ODD OBS

GREY FALCON - A PRIZE FOR ENTERPRISE

Bob Veston

Last October, Gloria and I were having a lazy Saturday afternoon drive along the Darling between Wentworth and Pooncarie, seeing the occasional Black Kite *Milvus migrans* soaring and searching and hearing the ubiquitous galahs screeching when we saw a Grey Falcon *Falco hypoleucos* soaring around tree top level. Suddenly it stopped and hovered. We slowed the car and then stopped to watch its interest. We had the camera ready as the falcon parachuted downwards. We watched. When the bird was a metre or so from the ground we saw its attraction - a goanna a metre or so long. The goanna was not pleased to see the falcon and reared on its hind legs and tail and lashed at the falcon with both forelegs. The falcon manoeuvred, watched and rushed the goanna. Sadly the falcon saw us and forgot his quarry.

We saw the action but missed the photo. We gave the falcon a prize for enterprise.

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CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
Letter to the Editor: Introduced Species Revisited	58
Observations of Thornbills, Weebill and Scrub Wren in Red Hill Garden	60
Proposed Musk Duck Study Group	61
Important: Personal Liability	61
Some Mount Ainslie Observations	62
An Unusual Beach Washed Petrel	63
Black Swan Breeding in Lake Burley Griffin Area: Second Half of 1982	65
Boobook Meal	66
The Gape of the White-plumed Honeyeater	67