canberra bird notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 28
Number 2

June 2003

Registered by Australia Post — Publication No. NBH 0255

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DO SOUTHERN BOOBOOKS DUET OR DUEL?

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Each year since 1993, we have found the nests of three or four pairs of Southern Boobooks *Ninox novaeseelandiae* near Aranda in Canberra, trapped and weighed the adults, and their young, banded them, and fit radios onto the backs of some and followed them. The radio-tagged owls roam over O'Connor Ridge, Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain, and the suburbs of Cook and Aranda. In summer, just after dusk, they catch flying insects and other invertebrates crawling on eucalypt branches and leaves, But in winter they tend to hunt birds, mainly small species, pardalotes and wrens, but sometimes birds the size of rosellas, and sometimes they catch them in bushes and trees in people's yards, while the people indoors eat dinner. During this study we noticed that our pairs didn't seem to behave as the learned texts said they should, a number of claims made for Southern Boobooks in the literature weren't necessarily supported by much evidence.

An often-repeated claim about these common medium-sized owls is that paired males and females 'duet' - they sing together. This is an appealing notion - that mated pairs sit together in a tree and, using the familiar two-note *'boobook'* call, sing a two-part harmony in order to cement their conjugal bonds and announce solidarity against their neighbours. But, is it true? Moreover, does it matter? Well, many ornithologists would say yes, that it is true, and yes, that it does matter because, as scientists, we want to be accurate in what we write about our Australian birds, even our most common ones, And it is important for other reasons.

The nine species of owls that breed regularly in Australia are difficult to find and even more difficult to study, particularly those species that live in forests. Australian owls hunt mostly at night, they slip quietly away from their day roosts, and Australian owl researchers have not, so far, found many nests, So, when you read an account about the behaviour and status of an Australian species of owl, keep in mind that the authors have usually inferred much of their information from other types of study, often from listening to the owls' vocalisations, not from watching the owls through the night to see how they live. Some authors seldom see the owls they study, and very few authors follow colour-banded and radio-tagged owls through the forest. Mostly, researchers drive regular transects, stop at intervals, and listen for owls to call, or they play the recorded tape of an owl, then listen for owls to respond,

Researchers mark on a map the location of vocalisations they hear, and sometimes assume that they can distinguish male from female callers; they often assume that two owls calling from the same spot are duetting from the centre of their territory close to their nest, None of these assumptions has been carefully tested with even our most common species of owl, the Southern Boobook, and it doesn't explain why researchers seldom find nests when they venture into the forest pursuing the owl's calls. If these owls are calling from the middle of their territories, why are their nests are so hard to find?

Assuming that two calling owls are duetting from inside their territory may affect an estimate of the breeding pairs in an area, A cluster of vocalisations on a map, that is, a place where researchers repeatedly hear calling owls, can be interpreted as a pair in the middle of its territory near its nest. But these clusters of vocalisations could be owls from different territories calling on territorial borders, Counting these clusters as owls singing from territory centres could over-estimate the density of pairs, and under-estimate their home range sizes, particularly since owls may call from one border then move and call from another.

A second reason for accuracy in understanding Southern Boobook vocalisations is this: due to the myth that Southern Boobooks are a well-studied and thoroughly understood species, researchers who study vulnerable or endangered *Ninox* owls, for example the Christmas Island Owl *Ninox natalis,* refer to claims about the Southern Boobook to support their own claims, for example, that they duet, or that females have deeper voices than males - claims that are probably not true.

Our task, then, had three objectives — 1) determine how researchers define duetting (the first step in testing a claim, experimentally, or in the field, is to define terms), 2) find our own evidence in the field to support the claim that Southern Boobooks duet, and 3) assess the validity of previous research evidence that Southern Boobooks duet.

We started with more recent definitions and worked back in time, Marks *et al.* (1999) said about duetting in the Spotted Eagle Owl *Bubo africanus* '... the two vocalisations sound like only one. Similarly, female Eurasian Scops-owls *[Otus scops]* often duet so closely with their male partners that the monotonously repeated calls sound like a single, but two-part, call. The calls of two or more adjacent male scops-owls, while given at a very regular rate, are not synchronised with each other, and the pattern of calling thus differs from that of duetting mates.' (p,109). Campbell and Lack (1985) in their definition and description of duetting stated 'the complexity of song is increased by including contributions from two individuals, usually a mated pair. The songs produced are generally quite stereotyped and the two contributions so well coordinated that to the listener it seems to be produced by just one bird, ,..The precise timing of the different contributions to within hundredths of a second is a striking feature of duetting between mated pairs.' (p, 631).

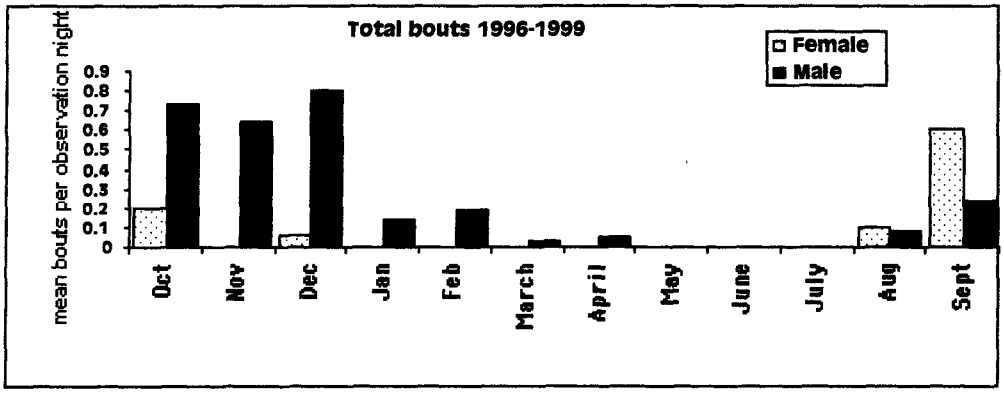
In an earlier, looser definition Farabaugh (1982) first defined the term 'bout'

because it was a crucial part of understanding her definition of duetting. She said, 'Vocalisations, like other behaviours, are clumped rather than randomly distributed in time, These clumps are called bouts,' (p. 87). She described duetting as when 'bouts of certain elements in the repertoire of one bird frequently overlap with bouts of certain elements in the repertoire of its mate. ,,. Further, there is some organization of both participants' elements within the region of overlap. This view can be expressed in terms of three variables that can be measured for any species: one measure of bout overlap, i,e, the percentage of bouts that overlap with bouts of the mate; and two measures of organization of male and female elements within overlapping bouts, i.e., the precision of timing and the sequential ordering of elements. .., The percentage of male bouts that overlap with female bouts, and vice versa, can be calculated for each type of bout (bouts of song, bout of each call type, etc.). If the percentage overlap is high, these overlapping bouts may be duets.' (p. 87).

With some definitions in place, how could we look for evidence of duetting in the field? As part of our larger study we noted, for three adjacent pairs of colour-marked Southern Boobooks over 529 nights, their Territorial Boobook calls, their territorial singing, We counted the number of bouts, as defined by Farabaugh, and attempted to identify the callers by sighting their colour-bands. Four of the six owls were radio-tagged, and by using the radio receiver, we could creep in close, see the owl against the lighter night sky to the west, then shine the torch on its legs, and see through binoculars the identifying colour-band.

We heard a bout of Boobook calling almost every other night. In 188 of the 255 bouts, at least one of the callers was male (74%), and in 67 of the 255 bouts at least one of the callers was female (26%). The bouts of Territorial Boobook calling were seasonal (see Figure 1 below). They peaked during spring and early summer, and dropped to zero during winter.

Figure 1. Territorial Boobook calls identified as male or female (n = 255). Mean number of bouts per observation night by month.



As you can see in Figure 1, both males and females called at similar times of the year, but females called less often, especially in November during the time when they incubated eggs and brooded nestlings, and they called less than males did in the autumn. The females in our three territories tended to call more often than males just before they laid their eggs and settled down to life as a parent.

Overlapping bouts

From Farabaugh's (1982) definition, we calculated the percent of bout overlap between mated males and females. As it turned out, only 2 of 255 bouts overlapped (0.8%), one on 3 September 1998 (three two-note calls overlapped for nine seconds), and another in a different pair on 31 August 1999 (three two-note calls overlapped for seven seconds). This makes two bouts out of 67 for females (3%), and two bouts out of 188 for males (1%), The two bouts were brief and didn't fit Farabaugh's definition of duetting, and we saw no overlapping bouts that were call for call in long bouts as described by some authors, authors who had not colour-marked their owls, but we did hear long overlapping bouts between neighbouring males.

We wanted to test Farabaugh's second and third criteria, precision of timing - whether the male's and female's calls were knitted so closely that they sounded like one call, and the sequential ordering of elements - that calls were co-ordinated in some fashion, male-female-female-female, or maybe male-male-female-male-male-female, But you can see from the percentages above that no pairs gave overlapping calls for long enough to measure co-ordination or sequential ordering of elements. But we knew of some commercial audio-tapes that had tracks of two Southern Boobooks calling at the same time (overlapping bouts), apparently recorded by introducing an artificial condition into the owl's territory, playing the call of unknown owl (incidentally, Southern Boobooks would almost never hear an unidentified owl calling from inside their territory) so the male and female would come to vocalise and defend their patch. We listened to these recordings to determine whether the calls were synchronised (precision of timing) that is, if they sounded like one bird calling, or if the two birds called in an orderly fashion (sequence of ordering). The calling in tape segments with overlapping bouts sounded like two birds randomly calling, like two dogs barking at the mailman, not like the Everly Brothers. This, according to Farabaugh, would not be duetting,

So, if the mated pairs we observed in the field seldom called at the same time, their bouts of calling almost never overlapped, and the two birds on audio tapes weren't calling synchronously, and their calling wasn't orderly, what was the behaviour described by other researchers. If not duetting, then what was it?

Duels

In our study, neighbouring males often faced off along territory borders and called simultaneously. We called these overlapping bouts between unmated neighbours 'duels' and defined a

'duelling' bout as two birds from both be forms of overlapping bouts of different territories facing each other, 1- Boobook calls, so we compared the 50 m apart, and calling with Boobook percentage of bouts of 'duels' between calls, with bouts overlapping. On 25 of neighbours, with overlapping bouts 529 nights (4,7%), we watched males between mated pairs. As you can see in duel with neighbouring males, on 1 night Table 1, most overlapping bouts were of 259 (0.2%), we watched a female duel between neighbouring males on territory with a neighbouring female, and on 2 borders. They lasted up to one hour, not nights of 529 (0.4%), we watched a a few seconds as the overlapping bouts neighbouring male duel with a between mated pairs had, At least 14 of neighbouring female. the 28 'duels' (50%) had three birds

present, often two males calling with a Duels' between neighbours, and duetting female looking on, but only two of the between members of a mated pair, would birds present actually called.

Table 1. Percent of overlapping bouts (2•1=30) of Boobook Calls in mated pairs and between neighbours (Duels) and percent of bouts (of 255 bouts of Boobook calls) where sex was identified.

	Percent Overlapping Bouts Between:			
	Neighbours (Duels)		**Mated Pairs**	
Overlapping Bouts	**11.0%**	(28/255)	**0.8%**	(2/255)
Involved Males	**13.3%**	(25/188)	**1.0%**	(2/188)
Involved Females	**4.5%**	(3/67)	**3.0%**	(2/67)
Total o'lapping (n=30)	**93.3%**	(28/30)	**6.7%**	(2/30)

So, perhaps, other researchers had heard 'duelling' between neighbours, and because they hadn't sexed or colour-marked their study owls, and didn't know where the territory borders lay, they had incorrectly assumed that two owls duelling on a territory border were a mated pair duetting from the centre of their territory.

At the end of three years of study and 529 observation nights what did we have? For Obiective 1. we now had working definitions for duetting and 'duelling'. For Objective 2, did we find any evidence in the field to support the claim that Southern Boobooks duet? - no. We observed twice some brief (seven and nine seconds) overlapping of Boobook calls between mated pairs, However, on no occasion did the overlapping calls sound like one call. In no case did the overlapping calls sound coordinated with any precision or did we hear sequential ordering of elements. That is, nothing we heard fit the

definitions of duetting given by Farabaugh (1982) Campbell & Lack (1985), or Marks *et al.* (1999).

For objective 3, assess the validity of the previous authors' research evidence for duetting, we had to treat with some caution the reports in the scientific literature for duetting because most researchers hadn't sexed the birds they heard. They hadn't colour-marked or radio-tagged them. In the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (Higgins 1999) it was concluded that Southern Boobooks did duet based on three pieces of evidence: 1) captive pairs duet; 2) in the wild, two birds, apparently male and female, both giving Boobook Call, were collected together from the same tree (Whitlock 1923); 3) in New Zealand, birds close together sometimes seem to duet rather than duel.

Looking at each piece of evidence on its own:

(1) Captive pairs — mated males and females in captivity do call simultaneously; their bouts of calling do overlap. But is this duetting? And does behaviour that happens in captivity necessarily happen in the wild?

Firstly, the calls of these captive pairs are not synchronised, and the elements aren't sequentially ordered, there is no coordinating pattern in the male and female calling. They fail two tests of duetting. And the mated wild pairs in our study often separated during the night and called from different parts of their territory, though, when they did this, they never called at the same time - their bouts did not overlap. Captive pairs cannot separate and call from different parts of their territory as our wild pairs did, so, when captive pairs call, they must always call from the same place. And captive pairs are often housed in cages next to other calling pairs, and inside the territories of wild calling pairs, a confusing and artificial condition. We can again use the analogy of two dogs locked in a yard, Each time the mailman passes, or the neighbouring dog starts to bark, they start barking. Is this duetting?

Inferring behaviour of wild owls from captives is a common practice in the Australian literature, There have been other repeated claims from observations on captive Southern Boobooks that have yet to be confirmed in the wild, for example that an extra female helps feed young at the nest. Verification of duetting is best done without artificial means, like captivity, because these artificial conditions contaminate and modify the behaviours of captive owls.

(2) Whitlock wrote an account of his travels through Western Australia and published it in the *Emu* in 1923, But if you read Whitlock's original account, he did not report duetting. He said, 'Owls were heard calling, when at a flying camp I had near the Crossing Pool, The night was bright moonlight, but for all that I could not distinguish either bird amongst the foliage of the River Gums. The note of one bird was distinctly lower pitched than that of the other. I shot a pair of what I took to be *Ninox ocellata* near this camp. Their plumage was much paler than that of specimens of the Boobook Owl *(Ninox boobook)* from further south. The iris of one bird was bright yellow, the other hazel brown,' (p.263).

Whitlock could not see the birds while they were calling, and he did not claim to have shot them from the same tree. There is no indication that the pair was giving the Boobook call, he was not certain as to the species, the pair was not surgically sexed, and there is no indication that they were male and female. The differing iris colours between the two owls suggest they may have been adult and juvenile. Even if they were a mated pair, no definition we found considered a single overlapping bout to be duetting, that is, the observer would have to record a high percentage of overlapping in a number of bouts,

(3) In New Zealand, birds close together sometimes seem to duet rather than duel, The problem here is that the study referred to did not confirm duetting, and furthermore, none of the five studies of radio-tagged or colour-banded Southern Boobooks, studies where researchers knew for certain the sex of the owls (Imboden 1975; Olsen & Bartos 1997; Olsen & Trost 1997; Stephenson 1998; this study) confirmed duetting with Boobook calls.

So, we found no evidence in the field, and no compelling evidence in the scientific literature, that Southern Boobooks duet. Bigger studies of more wild pairs may conclude that these owls do duet, but we doubt it. To test assumptions like these, we need to carefully define behaviours like duetting and 'duelling', then test our hypotheses in the field, and carefully examine the claims made in other studies, Care should be taken when biologists infer behaviour, territory size, and the status of Australian owls solely from surveys of vocalisations. And in our recent studies of *Ninox* species in Indonesia, like the Sumba Boobook *Ninox rudolfi* (Olsen *et al.* 2002c) we draw lessons from their Canberra cousins. Pairs come together to a recorded call, but when we hear two owls calling in the night unsolicited by recorded playback, we draw a line on a map as a possible territory border.

If we are to help *Ninox* species that are Vulnerable or Endangered in Australia or elsewhere in the world, we need to learn more about their more common relatives.

* This paper is adapted from Olsen 3, Marcot B & Trost S (2002a).

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RAINBOW LORIKEETS BREEDING IN THE ACT ASSISTED BY REGULAR DIETARY SUPPLEMENTATION

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Introduction

Rainbow Lorikeets *Trichoglossus haematodus* are widespread across Australia, occupying a diversity of habitats along the eastern seaboard including the suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Forshaw 1988, Higgins 1999). A feral population has successfully established in Perth. The ACT is probably marginal to the natural range of the species although there have been occasional records of birds as far west as Coonabarabran, Dubbo, Parkes and Albury.

First records for the species in the ACT were made prior to 1950, but sightings increased steadily from 1970 when six birds were released at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. Breeding was suspected at the time (Peters 1971, Wilson 1999), Evidence for the existence of a local population came from an analysis of records of 'pet' species by Veerman (1991) who found that the number of Rainbow Lorikeet records in 1987-88 was far in excess of the combined total for all other 'escapee' species. On this basis it was concluded that the species was probably surviving in the wild.

The difficulty in distinguishing escaped or released aviary birds from wild birds, however, makes the status of the species in Canberra difficult to assess (Veerman 1991, Wilson 1999). Until recently the species has been treated as a rare visitor to the ACT (see COG 2000, Wil-

1999). However, partly due to the observations reported here, the Rainbow Lorikeet is now listed as a rare breeding resident (COG 2001, 2002).

Methodology

Rainbow Lorikeets were observed between June 2000 and July 2001 at an urban site in Springvale Drive, Hawker, where residents of one of the flats made food regularly and reliably available. Birds Australia Atlas surveys were done at the location and incidental records and notes were made of events such as the presence of dependent young and mortality. The residents of the flat who fed the birds were interviewed, and close observation of the feeder was made from a neighbouring flat throughout the study period.

Observations

Rainbow Lorikeets were present on a daily basis at the survey site, where their presence was encouraged by the regular provision of food.

The feeding station

The feeding station was operated whenever the residents of the flat were home. Any excess food was removed from the feeders before the residents left the flat. The lorikeets' preferred food was a mix of one third honey in water, offered in shallow earthenware bowls, This was provided in portions of

approximately 125 ml and was supplemented on demand. Consumption typically varied from 125 ml to 375 ml per day depending on the number of birds that fed. Two birds typically consumed about 125 ml per day.

Food consumption was not evenly distributed amongst the visiting birds, An aggressive pair of breeding birds monopolised access to the feeder, They were observed making repeated trips from the feeder to dependent young perched in nearby trees, As the offspring became more independent they were tolerated at the feeders,

Sunflower seeds were also available at the feeding station. Rainbow Lorikeets made little use of this resource, but it did attract other species. Other birds attracted to the feeder on a daily basis included Sulphur-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua galerita* and Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans*, Galahs *Cacatua roseicapilla* and Rock Doves *Columba Livia* visited approximately once each week and Australian King-Parrots *Alisterus scapularis* visited 34 times yearly (Stokell pers. comm.). The lorikeets dominated all of these species and drove them from the feeder.

Abundance

According to the owner of the feeding station, Rainbow Lorikeets first began to visit in January 1999. A pair of birds appeared regularly for three months, but visits declined and then ceased as winter approached. In October 1999 visits began again, this time by a group of three to four birds. By June 2000, when my observations began, the group had increased to nine. Numbers fluctuated between five and thirteen over the following year, with the number again lower during winter.

Breeding

Three broods, each consisting of two dependent young, were observed at the survey site between December 2000 and June 2001, Dependent young were identified by a range of characteristics and behaviour. These were: brown coloured bill, short tail feathers, begging calls, receipt of food from other birds, inefficient flight and difficulty perching. When first seen, the young birds were not observed to feed for themselves and were highly dependent. The youngest birds were not observed to fly further than 30 m in one flight, and I believe they were newly fledged. When in flight, they appeared to have difficulty gaining height, and when perched were prone to falling.

Mortality

Rainbow Lorikeet mortality was relatively high, with three confirmed deaths and two birds rescued. The cause of mortality was collision with windows, A number of stairwells have windows on both sides and flying birds have a clear view through the structures. Deaths were recorded in September 2000, 20 December 2000 and June 2001. Two birds were rescued after colliding with a window in March 2001,

Anecdotal evidence suggests that mortality was also relatively high amongst dependent young. This was suggested by the failure of several of these birds to return to the feeder with

their parents and siblings. These occurrences were not documented.

Discussion

Although no nest or nest site was observed, these observations provide compelling evidence of breeding by Rainbow Lorikeets in the ACT. The inefficiency of the young birds' flight suggests the nest site was in close proximity to the feeding station in Springvale Drive. It also seems likely that breeding success was enhanced by the supplementary feeding, It is noteworthy that dependent young were observed between December and June, whereas the normal breeding period for Rainbow Lorikeets in south-eastern Australia is generally from June to January (Forshaw 1988, Higgins 1999).

I have estimated the energy content of 125 ml of food to be 600 Id. Captive birds weighing about 150 g are estimated to require 230 Id per day. (Higgins 1999) This suggests that the feeding station provided a large proportion of the daily energy requirement of these lorikeets. Behaviour at the feeding station suggested that the food was monopolised by a dominant pair of birds and hence allocated to breeding.

These observations provide no evidence to suggest that Rainbow Lorikeets are becoming more common in the ACT. However, given the popularity of bird feeding in Canberra, it raises the possibility that supplementary feeding might make a significant contribution to maintenance of the population. An attempt to quantify the level of supplementary feeding activity in Canberra may be of use in long term monitoring of bird populations.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Ross Stokell for his cooperation in studying the birds and to all COG members who have contributed to COG databases, with special thanks to the database managers Paul Fennell and Philip Veerman. Thanks also to Philip Veerman and David McDonald for kindly commenting on the manuscript.

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PAINTED HONEYEATER REPORTS IN THE CANBERRA REGION DURING THE 2002-03 INFLUX

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The purpose of this article is to summarise and consolidate known reports of Painted Honeyeaters *Grantiella picta* in the Canberra region in the spring/summer of 2002-03, In this season, there was an influx of this species regionally from late October 2002 until January 2003. It is important to document records of threatened bird species, and the Painted Honeyeater is listed as a vulnerable species under the ACT's *Nature Conservation Act 1980;* it is listed as rare or vulnerable in some other states (M Stanger et al. 1998).

This influx is thought to be drought-related, due to the severe drought conditions inland in western NSW and Queensland, this species' core habitat, It is noted, however, that there was an abundant crop of mistletoe berries in this season across the region and this may have influenced the birds to come to the area (Bounds 2003).

Observations about breeding attempts at three sites, Campbell Park/Mt Ainslie woodlands, Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve and woodland near TSR 51 on the Sutton Road in NSW have been documented in this journal in more detail (Lenz and Dabb 2003).

Table 1 contains a summary of Painted Honeyeater observations in the COG area of interest in 2002-03, Only some of these records have been formally reported to the Rarities Panel of the Canberra Ornithologists Group, and have been recorded in the COG database (COG 2003). Other records have been taken from the many reports on the COG email discussion list (cog-1); a few have been provided by individuals; and some records have been gleaned from published material (Lenz and Dabb 2003). Not every sighting reported on cog-i is included, as a large number of people saw the same birds at some locations, e.g. at Campbell Park. Key sightings which give a picture of numbers at this location at particular times are included.

From these records, woodlands of predominately Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* or Yellow Box/Red Gum *E. blakelyi* or those species in alliance with Red Box *E. polyanthemos* or occasionally Apple Box *E. bridgesiana,* with abundant clumps of Box Mistletoe *Amyema miquelii* were clearly the favoured habitat. There is one record in Red Stringybark *E. macrorhyncha* at 'Bibaringa', a property on the Cotter Road and a late (January) record at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (in unknown habitat). At Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve, the birds there targeted an area of mostly Yellow Box on the eastern side of the reserve, where mistletoe growth seems to be the most abundant in the reserve, in trees of small to medium size.

It is likely some sightings later on in the season, at different locations to those reported early on, were of the same birds moving around, possibly post breeding

dispersal. However, it can be reasonably concluded on the basis of this list that there were at least 35 Painted Honeyeaters in the region, and more likely a much higher number, as there is a lot of suitable habitat especially to the north of the ACT up to Gunning and across to Yass, on private properties, which was not searched as far as is known.

Sites with suitable woodland or riverine habitat, other than those on this list, were visited over this period by a number of experienced Canberra birders to look specifically for Painted Honeyeaters, but birds were not found at those sites. These visits were not, for the most part, regular searches at the same sites over the whole season, but appear to have been ad hoc. This species is easily detected when calling and displaying in the breeding season and, given the interest of many individuals in finding more birds at other sites, it is probable that the Painted Honeyeaters were absent at these places.

Other areas where birds were not found include: other woodland habitat at Mt Ainslie, Newline Quarry site, Mt Mugga/Isaacs Ridge, Castle Hill, Lake George woodlands and Bungendore, Molonglo Gorge, and sites along the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo Rivers, such as Uriarra Crossing, in River Oak *Casuarina cunninghamiana*. Flowering mistletoe *Amyema cambagei* was reported in the River Oak in places. The COG woodland surveys conducted in late November or early December at a number of key Yellow Box/Red Gum sites around the ACT also did not detect the species, except at Mulligans Flat NR. These woodland study sites include Hall/Gold Creek, Gooroo to the SE of Mulligans Flat, Mt Majura, Red Hill, Callum Brae (although two sightings are near Callum Brae), Tuggeranong Hill, Newline Quarry, Castle Hill and a leasehold north of Tharwa.

Riverine habitat apparently did not attract the species in the 2002-03 season, even though historically these birds have been believed to be associated with that habitat in Canberra. The (current) Action Plan No 19 for the Painted Honeyeater, and the revised Plan incorporated in the Draft ACT Lowland Woodland Strategy recently published, refers to this historical association, and the Action Plan No 19 refers to the principal habitat of the species in the ACT as River Oak woodlands (ACT Government 1999 and ACT Government 2003).

This historical association with riverine/River Oak woodlands is based largely on what may have been an unusual influx of Painted Honeyeaters in a couple of breeding seasons between 1948 and 1950, which may be atypical. Between 1951 and 2002, there were only five published records of single birds or a pair in the Canberra region; three in woodland areas (Mt Ainslie, Captains Flat Road and Rehwinkel's Animal Park) with the other two at riverine locations (Casuarina Sands and Tharwa) (Bounds 1994).

In the context of that conclusion about River Oak habitat in Action Plan No 19, there was brief commentary/discussion on the COG email list in November 2002, about whether there was a clear pattern of habitat preference of this species in the Canberra region, and

whether the presence of mistletoe and/or the proximity to permanent or near-permanent water in woodland habitats are the critical factors for this species (B Lepschi and others, cog-l 2002).

There has not been an opportunity to follow up and research this issue of local habitat preference more thoroughly. In the Capertee Valley in NSW (some 250 km from the ACT) Painted Honeyeaters are regularly recorded in the same kind of riverine (River Oak) habitat as occurs in the ACT, and where mistletoe is particularly abundant, In my many visits to the Capertee Valley, I have only recorded them in this habitat. In the Capertee Valley, the River Oak association may be because suitable habitat elsewhere has been largely cleared or is not flowering/producing enough berries; Regent Honeyeaters *Xanthomyza phrygia* are known to aggregate and breed in this riverine habitat in large numbers when conditions are poor and food sources elsewhere, such as flowering eucalypts, are scarce (David Geering pers comm.) The simple answer may be that Painted Honeyeaters are opportunistic, and like Regent Honeyeaters, will exploit any suitable feeding habitat, in this case mistletoe-related, whether riverine or woodland, within their range.

The author would welcome details of any other sightings of this species, e.g, at other locations or in other habitats, or additional breeding records, which would add to the regional picture in this season. The author acknowledges Nicki Taws for collating and providing some of the cog-1 reports.

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Table 1. Painted Honeyeater reports

Location	Date	No. of Birds	Source/Observer/Comments
Hall (Block 27, near Showgrounds pony club) COG Grid J11	26 —27 Oct	2	cog-1 M Zwankhuizen flowering mistletoe in Yellow Box/Red Gum
Campbell Park (1km north-west of offices, near small dam, uphill of triangular dam) COG Grid M13	27 Oct 29 Oct-9 Jan	1 pair	COG Database L Halasz Yellow Box/Red Gum woodland Lenz and Dabb 2003 One territory with nest built in Yellow Box, incubation commenced, nest probably abandoned
Campbell Park (between offices and horse grid) COG Grid M13	27 —28 Oct 27 Oct - 8 Dec	up to 3 pair	cog-1 M Gilfedder, C Robinson & others Birds perching in tops of large gums Lenz and Dabb 2003 One territory with nest built in Yellow Box, incubation commenced, nest probably abandoned
Mulligans Flat NR eastern side of reserve, birdwalk posts 5-6	30 Oct	1	cog-1 F Antram foraging in eucalypt (no mistletoe)
Rose Cottage Horse Paddocks (between Long Gully Lane and Isabella Drive) COG Grid L16	30 Oct	1	cog-1 N Webb in mistletoe, which occurs in 3 eucalypt species at site, Yellow Box, Red Gum, Red Box Also 1 bird a couple of weeks prior (date not documented) at same location collecting bailing twine for nest material

Campbell Park COG Grid M13	2 Nov	1	COG Database J McGuiness
Mulligans Flat NR, eastern side reserve birdwalk markers 4-6 COG Grid M10	2 Nov	4	cog-1 S Mugford (4 seen together in dead tree, chasing, possible mating display)
Mulligans Flat NR, eastern side reserve birdwalk markers 6, 6b COG Grid M10	2 Nov	1	cog-I M Zwankhuizen
Hall (Block 27, near Showgrounds pony club) COG Grid J11	3-4 Nov	No details	cog-1 M Gilfedder & C Robinson
Campbell Park woodland adjacent to car park, between offices and grid and at far dam COG Grid M13	4 Nov	5	cog-1 M Zwankhuizen
Campbell Park woodland adjacent to car park COG Grid M13	6 Nov	1	COG Database R Bell Bird calling, feeding in mistletoe
Campbell Park COG Grid M13	7 Nov	2	COG Database T Munro
Campbell Park COG Grid M13	9 Nov	2	COG Database Ian McMahon
Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve eastern side between birdwalk points 4 & 5 COG Grid M10	9-24 Nov	4	T Green as reported in Lenz and Dabb 2003 2 territories, one nesting attempt in Blakely's Red Gum; nest disappeared
Campbell Park (between offices & 	10 Nov	3	COG Database J Bounds Birds calling and flying high between trees
Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve between birdwalk points 4 & 5 COG Grid M10	10 Nov	1	cog-1 D Rosalky/T Green

Mulligans Flat NR and adjacent leasehold, eastern side reserve, near birdwalk marker 6b	17 Nov	1 or 2	I cog-1 M Zwankhuizen
Mugga Lane Riding School, Mugga Lane, uphill 400 metres SW of riding school buildings	19 Nov	2	cog-1 N Webb In mistletoe, probably Red Box; mistletoe abundant at site
'Woden' property Monaro Hwy near Callum Brae COG Grid L16	19 Nov	1	cog-1 N Webb bird heard
Mulligans Flat NR, eastern side of reserve, between birdwalk markers 5-6	20 Nov	4 2 pairs, one building nest	cog-1 T Green
Woodland near Gunning	23 or 24 Nov	6+	i cog-1
Campbell Park COG Grid M13	23 Nov	1	COG Database D McDonald
Mulligans Flat NR, eastern side of reserve, Between birdwalk markers 5-6	24 Nov	3	COG Database J Bounds mostly Yellow Box woodland with abundant mistletoe
Bibaringa, Cotter Rd ACT, 2 km north of Murrumbidgee River COG Grid H14 or H15	28-29 Nov	3 I	cog-1 S Harris In remnant Red Stringybark woodland with abundant flowering mistletoe; could not locate any birds 2 days later
Gunning/Sutton Rd, quarry site c 6km south Gunning COG Grid N3	30 Nov	12	COG Database J Bounds Mostly Yellow Box woodland with abundant mistletoe

Gunning/Sutton Rd remnant woodland 14km south Gunning COG Grid N4	30 Nov	3	COG database J Bounds Mostly Yellow Box woodland with abundant mistletoe
Gunning/Sutton Rd remnant woodland 19km south Gunning COG Grid 05	30 Nov	6	COG database J Bounds Mostly Yellow Box woodland with abundant mistletoe
TSR on Gundaroo to Gunning Road	Nov?	?	cog-I M Fyfe — observer P Wicksteed
Woodland adjacent to TSR 51 on Sutton Rd, NSW just north of ACT border	1 —19 Dec	2	cog-1 M Zwankhuizen/G Dabb In flowering mistletoe in Yellow Box; nesting attempted, nest abandoned
Burra Creek, NSW (south of ACT) COG Grid M21	19 Dec	1	COG Database Ian Anderson
Mt Taylor NR, ACT	11 Jan 2003	1	cog-1 M Zwankhuizen
Tidbinbilla NR, ACT East of Visitors Centre	11 Jan 2003	1	cog-1 M Zwankhuizen

Note: COG Grid Nos are stated where certain

ODD OBS

Eye to eye with a Collared Sparrowhawk

At 16:30 h on 29 May 2003 I was sitting in my utility reading a newspaper in the western outdoor carpark of Westfield Shopping Town, Belconnen, when something struck the windshield. Startled, I lowered my paper and looked into the face of a Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipter cirrhocephalus* sitting on the bonnet not 80 cm away. It was about 3 cm from the windshield on the passenger's side. Its right foot grasped the arm of the windshield wiper and its tail was spread against the bonnet for support. Its left foot was clamped on the breast of a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* which remained still, except for its bill which was open and quivering as it emitted a continuous distress call.

I got the impression that the sparrowhawk wasn't injured when it struck the windshield because it didn't seem distressed, Rather, it appeared alert as it continually glanced from side to side. It might have been a female judging from its size, It was certainly an immature bird as the underparts were off-white with dark brown horizontal splotches. Surprisingly, its hind toes appeared to be pink. However, when I reached home and checked some references, there was no mention of pink-toed sparrowhawks, So, upon reflection, I assume the hind toes were bathed in light bouncing off the shiny red bonnet.

After about a minute, the starling quit squawking and I assumed it had departed to the big celestial roost. Some 20 seconds later the hawk sprang from the bonnet and, as it did, the starling recommenced its swan song — if swan song is an appropriate way to describe the death-twitter of a Common Starling. The hawk flew close to the ground (about 150 cm), still carrying its prey. Perhaps it held this low altitude in order to take advantage of the cover afforded by rows of parked cars. Or, maybe, it had injured itself when it struck the windshield and was having difficulty carrying the starling.

A pair of Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca* swooped at it and a Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* gave chase. I lost sight of the hawk among the cars after it had gone about 40 m, It was heading in the direction of a fairly thick hedge, and I thought that it may have sought refuge there, but after searching around for ten minutes I couldn't locate it.

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Glossy Ibis in Griffith

Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis* commonly forage in Flinders Park, across Monaro Crescent from the front entrance to the Canberra Grammar School. On the evening of 14 March 2003, after a particularly severe thunderstorm in the Red Hill-Griffith area, two of these birds were seen in the company of a lone Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*.

Richard Mason
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Parrot food

Crimson rosellas ***Platycercus elegans*** eat predominantly fruit and seeds but also avail themselves of vegetative matter. On 12 May 2003 I observed, over a period of 5-10 minutes, a pair of adult Crimson Rosellas feeding placidly in the top of a large clump of bamboo [Poaceae, possibly ***Bambusa forbesii,*** an introduced species] in the back corner of our neighbour's yard. They were nipping off the youngest tips of the bamboo and apparently eating only the most tender parts, including the leaf sheaths but not the blade of the leaves. Four days later three immature Crimson Rosellas were seen doing the same thing. There is no record in HANZAB of bamboo being used as a food plant by Crimson Rosellas.

On 3 June 2003 three adult Crimson Rosellas were similarly observed eating tender young stem tips, as well as some unseasonal flower buds, from the ***Callistemon*** on our driveway. While ***Callistemon*** flowers are included as food items in HANZAB (Vol 4, p. 327), shoots are not.

Australian King-Parrots ***Alisterus scapularis*** have similar dietary requirements to rosellas, eating predominantly fruit and seeds. On two consecutive Saturdays in May 2003, at 10:30 h on 24th and at 10:45 h on 31', I watched a male and female king parrot feeding on the seeds of a Southern Catalpa ***Catalpa bignonioides*** [Bignoniaceae] in the yard of the house across the road. This species, also known as Indian Bean Tree, is an ornamental planting in Canberra, originating from the south-eastern USA. The king parrots would nip off the 25-30 cm long pods at the stalk, then, holding the pod with their foot, methodically split the pod longitudinally to expose the thin papery seeds, the kernel of which was then eaten. There is no record in HANZAB (Vol 4, p, 272) of ***Catalpa*** being used by Australian King-Parrots as a food source — which is rather disappointing as Brendan Lepschi ***(Emu*** 97:84-87, 1997) recorded ***Catalpa bignonioides*** being used by both Crimson Rosellas and Australian King-Parrots, though the 'fruit' rather than seeds specifically is recorded as being the part eaten, Curiously, HANZAB cites this reference for the Crimson Rosella but not for the king-parrot.

Harvey Perkins

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Synergistic feeding?

In late May this year we were watching a Black-necked Stork ***Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*** feeding at low tide on the Sandon River estuary in Northern NSW. Suddenly in the dusk we noticed a close packed flock of large white birds feeding nearby. It was a mixed flock of Straw-necked Ibis ***Threskiornis spinicollis*** and Royal Spoonbills ***Platalea regia,*** about six of each. They were intermingled and appeared to be engaged in a fantastic, chorereographed, slow dance. A closer look revealed that the ibis were digging deeply into the mud with their bills whilst the spoonbills engaged in their typical swishing bill movements. As they fed they moved around each other.

We assumed that the spoonbills were benefiting from food stirred up by the

ibis. This amazing show went on for at least ten minutes before the group broke up to rest or feed individually not far away.

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A White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike in a suburban garden

In the mid-afternoon of 12 June 2003, I caught a glimpse of a bird landing on the electricity wire in my back garden. It shuffled its wings, so I immediately concluded it was a cuckoo-shrike and for a moment thought little more about it. Then, recalling that it was winter and that Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes had mostly — sensibly - left for warmer climes, and noticing too that the bird in question was rather small, **I** fetched the binoculars to take a closer look at the new arrival.

Its true identity, that of a dark morph White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis,* was confirmed immediately when the grey barring on the breast became visible, The bird's head, upper breast and mantle were black, with a small imprecisely edged grey crown and small grey ear coverts. It sported two complete grey bars and three incomplete ones on the lower breast.

The same, or a very similar, bird returned to the same wire on 29 June.

A search of *Canberra Bird Notes* produced an interesting article by former editor David Purchase, describing a very similar bird in his Melba garden and reviewing the literature on the presence of the grey crown in the species (see *CBN* 14 (4) 1989: 92-94). I commend it to the growing band of White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike enthusiasts.

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Green magpies

Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* nested in our huge eucalypt last year. A wild gale in the autumn earlier this year blew down the nest. It was in perfect condition so we retrieved it and left it on a table on our deck.

A few weeks ago when the amorous couple started to build they rediscovered the old nest. Since then they have gradually recycled it right down to the fluffy lining. All that now remains is a flat base and unwanted lining material. Their newly completed nest is now ready for occupation. Recycling old building materials is a great example for humans to follow!

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Leucistic Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo

Wamboin is periodically visited by a leucistic (or xanthochroistic) Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptorhynchus funereus,* a bird well-known in the local community, and whose appearance usually results in a rash of emails amongst the local landcare/wildlife group. We have seen this spectacular bird here numerous times over the last three years or so, and several times recently, the latest visit being on 18 May 2003. It is generally in the company of a small group of conventionally plumaged

Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos, and appears to behave normally. It is apparently readily accepted by conspecifics, once having been seen in a huge flock of 100+ birds. While predominantly yellow, it has black primaries and secondaries, and most of its tail feathers also appear to be normal. It also has several black contour feathers on its breast and back, and several on its head. As yet no other bird showing similar traits has shown up, so it is not known whether the condition is hereditary, although a normally coloured begging juvenile was seen in its company earlier this year.

This form is not unknown among Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos. A photograph of one bird showing no black at all was published in Australian BirdKeeper magazine in 2001 (vol 14, issue 11, pp, 606-7). Also, a brown bird has been reported from the Blue Mountains, and in his *Australian Parrots* Forshaw (2002, p.70) records several partially xanthochroistic individuals in Victoria and NSW. The condition is believed to be caused by impairment to melanin production. Photos are available on request.

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BOOK REVIEW

David McDonald describes COG's new ACT Totals List for those who have recorded over 150 bird species in the ACT as 'this harmless exercise'. This description of twitching stood in such contrast to the frenetic activities of British twitchers described in the book I was reading that I thought you might be interested in the scene over there.

The book is *Birders (Tales of a Tribe)* by Mark Cocker, published by Jonathan Cape 2001, a lighthearted exposé for the lay reader of the idiocyncrasies of the 'tribe', The blurb describes them as '. . . a community of obsessional people who sacrifice most of their spare time, a good deal of money, sometimes their chances of a partner or family, even occasionally their lives, to watch birds'. I found this a particularly enjoyable read but have to admit to being somewhat biased in that the setting at times is the bird-rich Norfolk coast not far from my birthplace.

Cocker's enthusiasm for his subject is such that a whole chapter devoted to notebooks used in the field even coaxes the reader's interest in past and present types used by the serious birder. The all-comers record is held by Richard Porter who has filled 125 volumes, some of which have been published — but he did hold a position with the RSPB. 'String' is the title of a chapter on terminology: stringing is the worst crime of the tribe, not to be tolerated or forgiven. It means cheating in reporting, though doesn't include genuine misidentification. 'Unblocking' is at last finding a species you've long wanted for your list.

In the chapter Bins and Scopes' we learn of Rutland Bird Fair, the biggest bird jamboree in the world, catering for clubs, bird-book sellers, bird holidays, but mostly optics manufacturers. Some visitors wander around the fair with 'a thousand pounds' worth of optics round their neck. Often they have a telescope and tripod dangling from their side for good measure.'

Birding is a leading pastime in the UK nowadays since taking off in the 1970s and twitching does indeed appear to have become an obsession with many, if all the tales in *Birders* are true. The lengths some of the top birders go to to get their ticks make up the bulk of the book. To give a few examples: 800 people in 1990 made the difficult journey to Loch Spiggie in Shetland to see a Pallas's Sandgrouse, the only one recorded in the UK in ten years. In 1989 one Paul Doherty, on his way to post a letter, found a Golden-winged Warbler in a bush near Tescos. It should have been in high-altitude cloud forest in Guatemala. Two days later there were 3000 birders trying to get into the supermarket's carpark. One English couple, on a birding holiday at Cape May in the USA, rescheduled flights and travelled the 3000 miles home because, when they phoned a parent with whom they had left a pager set on mega-alert for any major rarity (a pager is designed to alert all rare bird sightings), they were told of a Common Nighthawk on Scilly, the first to be reported for ten years. They duly saw the bird, but then realized the flock of birds they had seen just before they got on the plane in the US but had been

unable to identify were ... Common Nighthawks.

We all know how birding authority figures in the UK set up rosters when a vagrant turns up and you may have to queue for hours for a few minutes attempt at a view of the bird. The author describes an entire day in line to see the 'mythically rare' Blyth's Reed Warbler, rejoining the queue each time his spell at the site was up.

The Brits also of course have their world lists. Cocker himself has been abroad sixty times to look at birds. One of the lives lost was of Alan Adams in Nepal who, determined to find the 'glittering prize', a Satyr Tragopan (a flamboyant-looking pheasant, I gather), left his accommodation hut in bad weather towards evening for a final search after walking and climbing all day and was never seen again. His body was never found. Another was David Hunt who, while in India riding on an elephant with a group, saw a large owl fly over, got down from the howdah and rushed into the forest in the hope of identifying it. When after twenty minutes wait the guide went to search for Hunt, he was found to have been mauled to death by a tiger.

Then there's the garden lists. I liked the one about Bryan Brand's home which overlooks the marsh at Cley, North Norfolk. Bryan has a garden list of almost 200 birds. After some embankment work on the marsh he could no longer see a certain pool so, hearing that a rare duck visited the pool, he removed lath, plaster and tiles to make a hole in the roof and subsequently was able to add not only the rare duck but several other desirable species to his garden list. Some people have telescopes permanently set up by their upstairs windows.

Of course conditions in the UK are quite different from here but do we have this sort of carry-on in Australia, I wonder? I thought not but then remembered the Queenslander whose object on retirement was to see an average of one new bird a day for the next ten years. That's around 3,650! When I came across him his total was getting on for 3,000 and he had booked a trip to Kenya where he expected to 'knock off another 700 or so in a couple of weeks. Then there's the frenzy of the occasional Twitchathon. Also, coincidentally today I listened to Occam's Razor (Radio National, 8 June 2003) in which Sue Taylor of Melbourne was on a trip twitching her last few birds for membership of the 600 Club and that sounded pretty obsessive to me! The feat has even been managed in one year apparently but she remarked that the successful birder did nothing else for the entire year.

But I agree with David — twitching is harmless. For most of us it merely adds a bit of fun and outdoor exercise to our ongoing interest in, love of, study of and, most important of all now, our conservation efforts on behalf of the 250 or so species in dire need of our help and protection.

Phyl Goddard

COLUMNISTS' CORNER

The views expressed in these contributions are those of ihe columnists and may not necessarily represent the views of COG.

The colour of birds

Consider this: of the 800+ species of Australian birds on the Christidis/Boles list, 322 bear recommended names containing reference to a colour. In the honeyeater/chat family, the proportion is about 60 per cent,

That trivial piece of information opens up several points for discussion, including whether it is sensible to call a bird a Rufous Whistler or a Scarlet Robin when only part of the bird (and only the male at that) is of the designated colour. In this connection, Stentoreus notes the suggestion by Dick Schodde in the June *Ganggang* that the Chestnut Quail-thrush should be renamed the Chestnut-backed Quail-thrush, on the ground, in part, that the bird is not chestnut.

This underlines the point that most colour-using names for non-British species were deliberately selected or invented to distinguish between species. By contrast, most popularly-developed names for British birds were based on voice, perhaps by adoption of a voice-based name in another language, or local pet-names.

To me, a particular irritation is the Red Wattlebird, as in the exchange with a new bird-watcher:

NB-W: What's that bird there?
Stentoreus: That's a Red Wattlebird.
NB-W: It's a *what?*
Stentoreus: It's a Red Wattlebird.
NB-W (totally baffled): OK. If you say so.

The fact is, 'Red Wattlebird' is in the company of that Canberra phenomenon, the Small Boatalert, or (by extension) that extinct breed, the Small Poxspecialist. The adjective is attached to the wrong noun. The bird is not red, and neither the alert nor the specialist is, necessarily, small. (Compare 'fine tooth-comb' - or, as I've even heard, just `toothcomb', as in 'they went through the office with a toothcomb' - as if all combs don't have teeth.)

However, resisting further such diversions, the purpose of this contribution is to share some thoughts on the aptness of colour labels for birds, both in their names and in the field guides.

As to names, these are in many cases the product of a forgotten history.

(a) Black Kite. A nice crisp name, but unfortunately used for a brown bird. Recommended for reasons of international consistency, having been adopted in England for a foreign bird to distinguish it from the Red Kite, (The Black Kite is distinctively 'Fork-tailed' — a better name in Australia - although it is less fork-tailed than the Red Kite.)

(b) Purple Swamphen. Also used for international consistency. Not purple (in

any sense) in Australia, although it is in some other parts of the world.

(c) Brown Goshawk. Not really brown, and certainly not distinctively so, except for young birds, as for the young generally of the goshawk/sparrowhawk group.

(d) Nankeen Kestrel. The problem with 'nankeen' is not that it is an archaic name for a sort of diluted chestnut colour but that most of the world's kestrels have the same colour, including, and to the same degree, the widespread Lesser and Common Kestrels. Gould, who coined the name, based it on the colonial name of Nankeen Hawk'. However, that name made good sense, since the kestrel was to the colonials distinctively 'nankeen' among the local hawks, and to replace this with Nankeen Kestrel' is like taking the descriptive 'White Heron' and changing it to the tautologous White Egret'. Don't those insular Australians know that most kestrels are nankeen?

If you dip into HANZAB you will find that different colour descriptions for each species appear at two points: first, in the introductory summary of field characters, and then in the detailed description at the end of the entry, based on examination of dead specimens. In the first HANZAB volume, the following useful explanatory points are made about the use of colours:

- colour depends on the light in which the bird is seen;
- the described colours were observed in either 'diffuse natural light' or under a 60W 'daylight' globe;
- the reference numbers in FR Smithe's (NCG') are used where relevant (but not the NCG *names);*
- instead, simple colour names have been chosen, using the following conventions -

  - in compound names the last-named colour is dominant (e.g. buff-yellow is more yellow than buff);

  - 'ish' indicates a weaker tinge, buffish yellow having less buff than buff-yellow;

  - 'light' is darker than 'pale'.

Regretfully, such helpful rules cannot be assumed to have been applied in other publications on Australian birds. If 'olive-green' is used, one doesn't know if this is the green of certain (processed?) olives or a colour mid-way (or on the green side of mid-way?) between 'olive' and 'green'.

However, HANZAB says the greatest problem is that different people perceive colours differently. This means, I think, not that some people are colour-blind, but that the same *words* signify different colours to different people, as in HANZAB's illustration: 'One man's sepia is another's fuscous, and so on.'

'Fuscous' is an interesting example to have given. Many given common names are clearly derived from the previously given Latin name, this apparently occurring with the Fuscous Honeyeater *Lichenostomus fuscus.* James Jobling's Latin-name dictionary entry on 'fusca' is:

> greys, and browns to a range of dark tints including slate-blue and dusky-orange.

The name of a colour can cover a wide range of possibilities. 'Red', for example, by itself, is almost meaningless. Names can signify different things at different times and at different places, An Australian ordering a 'tan' garment in the United States might be surprised when they get something of a light greyish-brown colour, There are two broad schools about 'purple', some seeing this as mid-way between red and blue (i.e. the colour some regard as violet), others seeing purple as the ancient shellfish-derived colour, close to, and in some writings the same as, 'crimson'. Then again, some see crimson as simply a deep red, not a 'purplish' red.

The often-used 'rufous' is also an imprecise word. In its first edition, the NCG avoided the name 'rufous' altogether on the ground that it had been used up to that point to cover too many different colours. However, in a later supplement it offered three bird-related rufouses, 'in a fairly narrow range of rufous', and suggested they be identified simply by their numbers rather than adding to the potentially confusing catalogue of names,

I am baffled by the use of 'lilac' by several books to describe the pink feathers on the back of the neck of the Spotted Bowerbird. In the NCG, 'lilac' is shown as a pale violet colour, approximating to what I understand to be the original colour of the lilac flower, before pink, white and other coloured cultivars became common. That NCG 'lilac' was cited by the 1978 re-namers of preference to lilac, (the NCG version of) 'purple' for Purple-crowned Fairy-wren'. (*Stentoreus* has made recent enquiries, and is reassured to be told that the word 'lilac' will not be used in the forthcoming HANZAB description of the Spotted Bowerbird.)

Discussion of colours can go on forever, but let me end with one more illustration of the predicament colour-users create for themselves. What colour is *turquoise?* Surely this is, simply enough, the colour of those familiar greenish-blue stones now associated with trinkets from Arizona or New Mexico. This is confirmed by two almost identical colours in the NCG: 'turquoise green' and 'turquoise blue' (itself a little confusing, as my dictionary says that 'turquoise' was originally an *abbreviation* of 'turquoise blue').

This is probably an unusual colour in birds, although ironically it often appears in bird-book illustrations, apparently as a result of limitations in the colour reproduction process. Take a look through the parrot pictures in the large-format Reader's Digest book, for example.

So, why Turquoise Parrot' then? The HANZAB describers of the bird, with the NCG in front of them, make no reference to turquoise. Neither do Pizzey, Slater, Forshaw, nor the NPI/Crome book. However, others seem to have been keen to locate some turquoise somewhere among the blues and greens of the 'turq':

- Lendon says the male's upper wing coverts are 'turquoise-blue' and the cheeks are 'turquoise-green'.

- Simpson & Day says the male has a 'turquoise blue' crown and face.

- Morcombe notes on his drawings that the male has 'extensive turquoise blue' on the face (which is not borne out by his illustration) and 'extensive deep blue and turquoise on flights, coverts'.

- JD Macdonald gives the face mask and edge of shoulders as 'turquoise'.

- but the authoritative large-format Reader's Digest book only finds 'turquoise' on the 'lesser and median wing coverts'.

(I might express a view here that some field guides, Morcombe's being an example, attempt far too specific colour descriptions that are not helpful for field identification.)

JD Macdonald adds the information that the name Turquoise Parrot was given by the RAOU in 1926 'possibly from species name *azureus* "blue" given by Lesson in 1830'. If so, that would be strange indeed. 'Azure' and related words, meaning blue, come from a Persian word for another stone, lapis lazuli, which *is* blue, not greenish. The RAOU seems to have got the wrong stone as well as the wrong colour. It seems a safe bet that no describer talked about turquoise in relation to this parrot until the RAOU introduced the term in preference to earlier descriptive names for it such as 'chestnut-shouldered'. Alas, space does not permit me to discuss the fascinating etymology of 'isabelline' (as applied to pratincoles and wheatears), for which I must refer you to your dictionary of eponyms.

A. stentoreus

Birding in cyberspace, Canberra style

`The Sovereign is dead! Long live the Sovereign!', they exclaim.* So with Australia's most significant tool for monitoring trends in biodiversity: the Birds Australia Atlas of Australian Birds project. Yes the data collection phase for the *New Atlas* has come to an end and the wonderful *New Atlas* will probably be in your hands by the time you read this. But the publication of the *New Atlas* does not mean that we cease collecting data, all of which contributes to our shared goal of conserving wild native birds locally, nationally and globally. This was emphasised in a message posted to the national birding einail discussion list Birding-Aus by Andew Silcocks and Chris Tzaros from Birds Australia. They explained:

> It has *come* to our attention that there is a perception among the broader birding community that the Birds Australia Atlas project is over. We take this opportunity to inform you that this is not correct. The Ongoing Atlas of Australian Birds has run for over a year (since early 2002) and will be continuing indefinitely. Please take every opportunity to spread this message far and wide and if you're wanting to get involved, please contact us.

> Many of you may be interested to know that the latest Threatened Bird Network (TBN)/Atlas newsletter (called `Volunteer 16') and can be downloaded from the following website: http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/tbn/volunteerl6.pdf. The newsletter outlines what is happening with the Atlas Project and how it is entering a new and exciting phase. It also provides news and reports on TBN activities and how you can get involved with upcoming events. If you would prefer a paper copy mailed to you or have any further questions, please email us (c.tzaros@birdsaustralia.com.au, a.silcocks@birdsaustralia.com.au) [or write to Chris or Andrew at Birds Australia, 415 Riversdale Rd, Hawthorn East Vic. 3123].

Now let's go global! A reader of this column has kindly drawn my attention to a wonderful on-line resource, the Internet Bird Collection, made available at http://www.hbw.com/ibc by the publishers of the *Handbook of the Birds of the Word,* As they explain,

> The Internet Bird Collection (IBC) is a non-profit endeavour with the ultimate goal of disseminating knowledge about the world's avifauna. It is an on-line audiovisual library of footage of the world's birds that is available to the general public free of charge. While the initial aim is to post at least one video per species, the long-term objective is to eventually include several videos showing a variety of biological aspects (e.g. feeding, breeding, etc.) for every species.

Individual species can be searched for by name, or lists of species browsed by region (Australasia is one of the regions). It is still early days for the project, and not many videos of Australian birds are yet available but what there are are a delight to watch. For example, for one of my favourite species, the Sarus Crane, three videos are available at a click of one's mouse: a video of two individuals preening; one of them feeding, and a third which is described as 'an individual doing sexual display'. The videos are generally available in two formats, one for high speed broadband internet connections and another for slower connections. Birders who capture video images of birds in the wild are invited to submit the images for inclusion on this site.

Experienced cyberspace birders make regular use of SDIs: selective dissemination of information services which will provide you, at regular intervals, with information you request on new publications, etc., in your areas of interest. These are often supplemented by web sites containing similar information. I don't subscribe to many birding journals — much of their contents is not of interest to me, and many are quite expensive - but I like to know what is being published so that I can go to a library and there peruse articles in which I am interested. Early alert services and online contents pages are a tool for achieving this goal.

Australia's leading ornithological journal is, of course, *Emu;* find it online at http: //www.publish.csiro.auLlournals/emu. Its publisher, CSIRO Publishing, has a free Early Alerting Service described in the following terms:

> Subscribe to your journals of interest, and you will be notified by email when a new issue is about to be published. We will automatically send you the table of contents, well in advance of the print publication, as the online edition of the

> issue becomes available. From the table of contents, you can freely access the abstract of any paper in an issue. You do not have to be a subscriber to a journal to register for this free service.

If you do not wish to receive the contents listing by email you can still visit the web site, click on 'Contents Pages' and find there the tables of contents for the journal and abstracts of all articles published back to 1997. Contents pages and abstracts are also available online for another high quality Australian journal *Corella*, published by the Australian Bird Study Association http://www.absa.asn.au/publications.htm 1. The abstracts of all articles published in all 26 volumes of *Corella* are accessible online and are searchable, a fantastic service to birders keen to remain aware of what is to be found in the published scientific literature. (An earlier article in this series mentioned the resource for international papers ROL: *Recent Ornithological Literature Online* http://www.nmnh. si.edu/BIRDNET/ROL described as 'a serial compilation of citations and abstracts from the worldwide scientific literature that pertain to birds and the science of ornithology'.)

This concluding section of the current column may be titled 'The Great Duck Threat, Part 2', as it builds on last time's discussion of the threat that Muscovy Ducks allegedly present to Australia's wild native waterbirds, The dreaded Mallard drew fire (if you take my meaning) on the national email discussion list Birding-Aus, with the first salvo being the observation, 'Speaking of grotty mallards, there was one in the Yarra next to the bike path in Abbotsford [illegible]

Pacific blacks wolfishly - no doubt considering nefarious ways of getting its genes into the PBD gene pool...'. (Reminded me of unpleasant Mallard observations in Lake Burley Griffin near Manuka,)

The question is, then, to what extent (if any) the introduced Mallard poses a threat to the genetic purity of the closely related indigenous Pacific Black Duck and Chestnut Teal? Martin O'Brien from the Victorian Government's Scientific Advisory Committee advised list members that genetic swamping from interbreeding and competition by Mallards was nominated as a threatening process in Victoria some years ago but the nomination was not accepted on the grounds that it 'is not a threat to the Chestnut Teal [and] it may be a threat to Black Ducks in New Zealand, but there is no clear evidence that the survival or evolutionary development of the Black Duck is threatened in Victoria'. A Kiwi correspondent warned against complacency, based on the huge number of Mallards in Aotearoa, and another pointed to their abundance in Hobart. David Geering responded thoughtfully that the Australian position is different:

> Consider for a moment where the vast majority of Australia's ducks are produced. Most ducks breed in the arid and semi-arid interior of this country on semi-permanent and ephemeral wetlands in what can only be described as a 'boom' and 'bust' cycle...Now consider where you find Mallards. In Australia they tend to be more common in semi-domestic situations - urban lakes are a common habitat. Yes, again, I know people have seen them in far flung wetlands but most are found in well settled areas. This is very contrary to the New Zealand

situation where they are widespread and abundant. It therefore seems that the chance for Mallards to interbreed with Black Duck is limited to these more urban areas - and this is precisely where we do see hybrid ducks. The research that I've done suggests that there appears to be little hybridisation with Chestnut Teal. There is also the suggestion that many so-called hybrids between Black Duck and Mallard are, in fact, misidentification of various 'breeds' of domestic duck derived from Mallards.

Perhaps this is a matter demanding careful monitoring in Canberra's lakes? And can you differentiate, with confidence, between Pacific Black Ducks, 'pure' Mallards, the various types of domestic ducks derived from Mallards, and Mallard/Pacific Black Duck hybrids? Might be worthwhile to check out Volume 1 Part B of HANZAB, just to be sure!

7' *alba*

Details on how to subscribe to *BirdingAus*, the Australian birding email discussion list, are on the web at http://www.shc.melb.catholic.edu.au/home/birding/index.html. A comprehensive searchable archive of the messages that have been posted to the list is maintained by Andrew Taylor at http://www.cse.unsw.edu.au/birding-aus. To join the *Canberra Birding* email discussion list, send a blank email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@topica.com, or join online at http://www.topica.com/lists/canberrabirds. At this site can also be found a searchable archive of messages posted to the Canberra Birding list.

`The Sovereign': gender inclusive language for what used to be 'The King'

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

A short list, this time, and a few entries running over into July have been included. It is interesting to note that the Freckled Duck are still around and that the Spotless Crake is still frequenting the far north-west corner of pond 6 at the sewage works. The Panel would really appreciate receiving reports of crake sightings from that spot, to help in its consideration of the bird's status. It may well not be rare but just particularly difficult to observe and identify with certainty.

The reports of the lone male White-headed Pigeon from the Bruce-Aranda area suggest that the same bird is involved. Erik noted that when it flew away from his back garden, it headed south in the direction of Aranda, Whether it is the same bird as reported previously in Ainslie is a matter for speculation. Again, this species is being reported with some regularity in our area, and deserves close attention. Lee Halasz reported that the bird seemed surprisingly tame.

Records continue to be received of the dark morph of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike, again raising the question of the species' true status in our region. The Panel suspects that the paucity of records in the past may have been because observers failed to look closely at over-wintering cuckoo-shrikes. The grey barring on the breast of the dark morph of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike can be most readily seen through binoculars and maybe we are simply not paying enough attention to cuckoo-shrikes. But as Dick Schodde stressed, 'go for the head', The head of the dark morph of the White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike is always black, sometimes with a grey crown, but always much more extensive than in the well-named *Blackfaced* Cuckoo-shrike,

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Freckled Duck *Stictonetta naevosa*

1; 19 April 2003; Jack Holland; Molonglo River GrL14

Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*

2; 17 July 2003; Mat Gilfedder; Fyshwick Sewage Ponds GrL14

White-headed Pigeon *Columba leucomela* **1** male; 15 May 2003; Lee Halasz; Arabana St, Aranda GrJ13

1 male; 13, 16, 18 July 2003; Erik Meijaard and Rona Dennis; Portus Place, Bruce GrK12

1 male; 16 July 2003; Harvey Perkins; Waldgrove Court, Bruce GrK12

Long-billed Corella *Cacatua tenirostris*

2; 20 June 2003; Richard Allen; Launceston St, Woden GrK15

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*

1 dark morph; 13 June 2003; 20 June 2003; Barbara Allen; Hansford St,

The COG office is located at Room 5, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic. Opening hours depend on the availability of volunteers. Please call the office on 6247 4996 to confirm that it is opal.

Canberra Bird Notes **is published by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc and is edited by Harvey Perkins and Barbara Allan. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcome on matters of the distribution, identification or behaviour of birds occurring in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area. Contributions on these topics should be sent to Harvey Perkins, 42 Summerland Circuit Kambah ACT 2902, or via email to harvey.perkins@anu.edu.au. Short notes, book reviews and other moons should be sent to Barbara Allan, 47 Hannaford Street Page ACT 2614 or via email to allanbm@ozemail.com.au. If you would like to discuss your proposed article in advance, please feel free to contact Harvey on 6231 8209 or Barbara on 6254 6520.**

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ARTICLES

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BOOK REVIEW

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