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ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN ORNITHOLOGIST'S UNION

A.C.T. BRANCH

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ANNUAL REPORT - 1964/65

INTRODUCTION

One of the original aims of the A.C.T. Branch of the R.A.O.U. has been to produce an annual bird report of the district round Canberra. This should provide a reliable record of the avifauna with its changes and fluctuations and could be expected to have considerable historic importance in the future, apart from any immediate interest.

As everything must have a start, there seems to be no object in putting off this undertaking and the following pages represent our first attempt, covering the twelve months from 1 July 1964 to 30 June 1965, however inadequate and even trivial much of it may seem to a critical reader.

Let me forestall some criticism by apologising for the lateness of its appearance which is the fault of the authors; by pointing out that some notes stray outside the limits of the period reviewed, though such poaching on past and future is difficult to avoid in annual reports, especially the first for an area: and by admitting boldly that we have really far too few records from regular observation to make a good, comprehensive and informative report.

That last point is the most important and should be emphasised. The "Observation Book" circulated at our monthly meetings merely attracts the spectacular and unusual. As far as I know, there are in the A.C.T. only two people who keep regular or anything like regular notes of all birds seen when they are in the field, with data on numbers, and movement and habits. But such recording is the only proper basis for a sound knowledge of the birds of an area, provides the bread and butter for such things as annual reports and can be outstandingly useful in detecting the first signs of fluctuations in numbers or change of status, especially if the same area is observed at regular intervals from daily to weekly.

Thus if this report, by displaying our lack of detailed information, encourages a few people to keep regular and complete records of the birds they see, it will have achieved one of its purposes: and I would urge our members and supporters to do just this, so that future reports can be expanded and improved.

(S. Marchant)
Chairman

3rd December, 1965.

SYSTEMATIC NOTES 1964-5

by S.J. Wilson

Since the A.C.T. Branch of the R.A.O.U. started, an "Observations' Book" has been circulated at each monthly meeting. This has resulted in many interesting records, the addition of several new species to the A.C.T. list, and one new species to the Southern Tablelands list. For the purpose of an annual bird report, however, many common species have not been mentioned in the "Observations' Book" and it has been necessary also to use private notes and the records of the R.A.O.U. Nest Record Scheme for the following account. This emphasises the need for regular records of the occurrence even of common birds, so that the changes in the avifauna may be recognised.

This report covers the period from 1 July 1964 to 30 June 1965. Rainfall in the spring and early summer was above average, though the previous summer had been dry, and the 1964 rainfall was the same as the annual average in Canberra. The first half of 1965 was extremely dry. Nesting outside the Ranges ended abruptly when the very hot, dry weather started in January 1965.

Generally the 1965 drought has had an adverse effect on local birds, particularly those inhabiting the open forest country. Birds in the denser forests of the Ranges were less affected. Most of the smaller species in the open places and hills around Canberra seem to have been badly affected.

Not all the species on the A.C.T. list are mentioned in the following notes, but that is because no observations were recorded for them during the period.

Stubble Quail. Recorded in spring and summer. Information on the winter status is needed.

Brown Quail. Several in 1963-64 round Lake Burley Griffin as it filled. No records since.

Painted Quail. Regularly seen and heard on Black Mt. in last quarter of 1964: also on Mt. Pleasant and in the area where Curtin is now being built.

Peaceful Dove. One near Duntroon May 28, 1965.

Common Bronzewing. Thinly distributed and not often seen except in the Botanical Gardens: less regularly noted on Mt. Ainslie, in the plantation beyond Curtin, and in the pine plantation west of the Scrivener Dam.

Brush Bronzewing. Several sightings in the Ranges in November and December, where it may be a post-breeding wanderer.

Wonga Pigeon. Small numbers resident in the Ranges.

Banded Landrail. Last recorded January 1964, as Lake Burley Griffin filled.

Spotted Crane. As for last species.

Marsh Crane. Last recorded February 1964, when it was very common on the swampy edges of Lake Burley Griffin.

Dusky Moorhen. Occasional at east end of Lake Burley Griffin.

Eastern Swamphen. Occasional at east end of Lake Burley Griffin. A pair which has inhabited the dams at Uriarra Homestead in previous years, left when the dams were drained and reconstructed in the autumn.

Coot. Common at times at east end of Lake Burley Griffin.

Great Crested Grebe. Seen on Lake Burley Griffin in January 1964, the first record for the A.C.T.

Little Grebe. Occasional on Lake Burley Griffin and local swamps.

Hoary-headed Grebe. Several on Lake Burley Griffin in 1963-64, but no records 1964-65.

Black Cormorant. Always common on Lake Burley Griffin.

Little Black Cormorant. Occasional on Lake Burley Griffin; fairly common on Lake George.

Pied Cormorant. Occasional at Lakes George and Bathurst.

Little Pied Cormorant. Always fairly common on Lake Burley Griffin.

Darter. First record for the area at Lake George March 14, 1964 and several later sightings: first record for A.C.T. on the Molonglo river above Lake Burley Griffin throughout May 1965, up to five birds at one time.

Pelican. Single birds occasional on Lake Burley Griffin; common at Lake George most of the year.

Marsh Tern. First record for A.C.T., one on Lake Burley Griffin in January 1964: another on October 11, 1964.

Caspian Tern. Three on Lake George September 2, 1964.

Silver Gull. Always on Lake Burley Griffin in small numbers.

Spur-winged Plover. Fairly common breeding resident, particularly near Lake Burley Griffin. It became remarkably common on watered lawns in public areas in Canberra from January 1965.

Banded Plover. Several records at Fairbairn Aerodrome and near Bungendore.

Double-banded Dotterel. Reported in winter at Lake George.

Black-fronted Dotterel. Widely distributed along rivers and around lakes. Nest found at roadside near Hall with three eggs on October 10, 1964.

White-headed Stilt. Occasional at Lake Burley Griffin and Lake George, but not during the winter.

Red-necked Stint. First record for the area at Lake George September 14, 1964.

Japanese Snipe. Recorded at Lake George, Bungendore and even in Curtin between November and January.

Painted Snipe. A few birds in January and February as Lake Burley Griffin filled: no records since.

Glossy Ibis. First record for A.C.T. on Jerrabomberra Creek near Lake Burley Griffin on March 25, 1964, four present for several days: also at Lake George on March 6 & 8, 1965.

White Ibis. Occasional in small numbers at Lakes George and Burley Griffin.

Straw-necked Ibis. More common than last species: perhaps thirty or more in Canberra throughout winter 1965, e.g. in the Botanical Gardens, by P.M. Lodge and elsewhere.

Royal Spoonbill. Recorded in A.C.T. on March 25 and May 11, 1965.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Flocks of up to 10 on Lake Burley Griffin and up to 19 (unusually large) at Lake George throughout the year.

Plumed Egret. One on Lake Burley Griffin in June 1965.

White Egret. The commonest egret in the area: occasional at east end of Lake Burley Griffin.

Cattle Egret. First record for the Southern Tablelands at Lake George early January 1964: First record for A.C.T. near east end of Lake Burley Griffin October 10, 1964.

White-faced Heron. Very common while Lake Burley Griffin was filling; occasional elsewhere during the year; bred in paddocks west of Black Mt.

White-necked Heron. Records on Lake Burley Griffin, two February 16, three February 27, one April 14, 1965.

Nankeen Night-Heron. Two on the Molonglo river above Lake Burley Griffin February 27; two in same area May 24-31, 1965.

Maned Goose. Very common in swamps at east end of Lake Burley Griffin in summer, maximum at one time 600.

Black Swan. Always a few on Lake Burley Griffin or on swamps at east end.

Plumed Tree-Duck. First record (\pm 20) for the Southern Tablelands at Lake George on May 17, 1965.

Mountain Duck. Occasional on Lake Burley Griffin; fairly common on Lake George.

Black Duck. Commonest duck on Lake Burley Griffin. First ducklings noted below Black Mt. on November 2, 1964.

Grey Teal. A few usually on the swamp at east end of Lake Burley Griffin.

Blue-winged Shoveler. Four on swamp at east end of Lake Burley Griffin on July 5, 1964; occasional on lake itself and at Lake George.

Freckled Duck. About 50 on Lake George in July and August, 20 during March; first record (5) for A.C.T. in Yarralumla Bay on April 1, 1965.

White-eyed Duck. Several flocks (maximum 60) on Lake Burley Griffin in winter, especially at Sullivan's Creek, but also on swamp at east end.

Musk Duck. Occasional at west end of Lake Burley Griffin.

Swamp Harrier. Several over Lake Burley Griffin as it filled in early 1964; no records since.

Brown Goshawk. Two nests successfully fledged young, near Black Mt. and Mt. Mugga. A young bird, banded in the second nest on 20 December, was shot at Cowangie, Vic., 440 miles west, on June 7.

Collared Sparrowhawk. Recorded in the Ranges on March 29, 1965; occasional over the City.

Wedge-tailed Eagle. Bred sparsely throughout the area.

Little Eagle. Occasional, most often near Lake George.

Whistling Eagle. Occasional throughout the area; may have bred on Black Mt.

Black-shouldered Kite. Birds often seen along the Molonglo valley above Lake Burley Griffin.

Little Falcon. Occasional throughout the year in all areas.

Peregrine Falcon. Bred at Lake George in November 1964 in an old nest of a Wedge-tailed Eagle; eggs did not hatch.

Black Falcon. One at Ulmarra (13 miles north of Cooma) on April 26, 1965.

Brown Hawk. Widely spread and often seen in open country.

Nankeen Kestrel. Fairly common, often in open country round Canberra, but numbers probably affected by drought.

Boobook Owl. Commonest owl, often heard in Canberra.

Little Lorikeet. At Lake George February 9 and at Gungahlin March 1-3, 1965.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo. Fairly regular in the Ranges in summer, but breeding is not known.

Gang Gang. Common in winter 1964 in Forrest, but much less so in winter 1965.

White Cockatoo. Appears to breed chiefly in the Ranges: large flocks formed after breeding.

Major Mitchell Cockatoo. Two near Gungahlin May 7, 1965. There have been several recent sightings, too frequent for escapees.

Galah. Common in city area, breeding. Large flocks formed after breeding, e.g. 300 in Yarralumla area and Narrabundah.

Cockatiel. Two August 6, 1964, two February 13, 1965, possibly escapees.

King Parrot. Occasional in the Ranges, but only visited Canberra in the winter.

Crimson Rosella. Commonest parrot, especially in forested areas.

Eastern Rosella. Widespread and common.

Red-backed Grass Parrot. Fairly common; large winter flocks; roosts on City Hill.

Blue-winged Parrot. First record for A.C.T., one Weetangera May 3, 1965.

Swift Parrot. Nine at Narrabundah May 10, 1965.

Tawny Frogmouth. Widely, but sparsely distributed; no longer breeds on Black Mt. Peninsula.

Owlet Nightjar. Rarely recorded; one near Queansbeyan in October 1964.

Dollar Bird. First arrival October 19, 1964. Bred in and around Canberra, e.g. Black Mt., Mt. Ainslie. Evening flocking, characteristic of the family, noted on the Murrumbidgee river in February.

Sacred Kingfisher. First arrival October 3, 1964.

Rainbow-bird. Bred fairly commonly along rivers and in open areas near Canberra.

White-throated Nightjar. Very rare; one near the Drive-In Theatre in February 1965.

Spine-tailed Swift. Several during March and April 1964; last on April 8.

Pallid Cuckoo. First arrival August 31, 1964. Parasitism of Leaden Flycatcher twice recorded.

Fantailed Cuckoo. Commoner in the Ranges. Parasitism of Brown Thornbill once.

Brush Cuckoo. Parasitism of Grey Fantail during January 1965. Also recorded twice, December 1964 and January 1965.

Horsfield Bronze-Cuckoo. Fairly common in open forest during September, rare afterwards. Apparently common on passage in area, but few remain to breed; parasitism of Buff-tailed Thornbill, Brown Thornbill, and Blue Wren recorded once each.

Golden Bronze-Cuckoo. Most numerous in the Ranges, but breeds about Canberra quite frequently; three cases of parasitism of Yellow-tailed Thornbill, one of Brown Thornbill.

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo. One at Lake George in late August 1964 - a New Zealand species probably accidental to Australia.

Superb Lyrebird. Common breeding bird in damp gullies in the Ranges; one nest found with large young bird in late August.

Welcome Swallow. Often over Lake Burley Griffin in flocks during the winter; well distributed in more open country in summer. Some migration occurs but is not understood. First eggs laid about September 13.

Tree Martin. First arrival in August; well distributed in open forest for breeding.

Fairy Martin. First arrival September 27, 1964. Often breeds in culverts, under bridges and along erosion gullies. Seven dead birds, desiccated, in one nest near Bungendore on October 24, 1964. On November 10 the same colony had at least three nests with 2 eggs and two nests with 3 eggs, fresh.

Grey Fantail. Breeding commonly and widely; first eggs laid about 22 October, although nests had been built three weeks earlier. Leaves the Ranges almost completely from late May to mid-August; near Canberra some in most areas during winter; but movements not well understood.

Rufous Fantail. First arrival on October 25, 1964. Bred commonly in the Ranges; one nest successful on or about March 7, 1965. Passage migrant only about Canberra.

Willy Wagtail. Bred commonly in open country and about the city from October 30, 1964 to January 16, 1965.

Leaden Flycatcher. First arrival on October 17, 1964; not common; bred on Mt. Mugga and near Black Mt. from mid-November.

Satin Flycatcher. First arrival October 10, 1964; rather rare. Breeds locally in the Ranges, but only on passage in Canberra.

Restless Flycatcher. Sparse resident; bred in Mt. Mugga area from mid-November.

Jacky Winter. Not common; bred near Mt. Mugga in November. Occurrences in A.C.T. irregular and not understood.

Red-capped Robin. Female banded in Botanical Gardens October 5, 1964; a pair seen on west side of Black Mt. December 12, 1964.

Flame Robin. Common on the Tablelands in winter, in high country in summer. At least two pairs bred on Black Mt. in September 1964, which seems unusual.

Pink Robin. A few in the Ranges between April and August 8, 1964; less frequent in April to June 1965. Female at Yarralumla May 15, 1965.

Rose Robin. Passage migrant in Canberra; common summer breeder in Ranges.

Hooded Robin. Breeding began early September 1964 in open forest round Black Mt. At least one nest was attended by two males and one female.

Southern Yellow Robin. More common in the Ranges than around Canberra, but fairly distributed where good undergrowth occurs under trees, as in gullies on Black Mt. First eggs laid on Black Mt. in late August, but about two weeks later in the Ranges.

Golden Whistler. Vertical migrant; noted near Canberra in mid-November, which is late; juveniles appeared in Canberra in March 1965. First eggs found on October 26, 1964 in the Ranges; probably a few breed in Canberra.

Rufous Whistler. Juvenile banded in February 1965, retrapped in June; perhaps a few overwintered, though normally the species seems to be a summer visitor. Burst of laying in the Canberra area about November 18, 1964; few nests started after January 1, but in the Ranges laying continued to mid-January.

Olive Whistler. Widespread in the Ranges; some movement occurs but is not yet understood.

Grey Shrike-Thrush. Resident, widespread, but leaves the Ranges in winter. Eggs laid from about September 20 on Black Mt.

Magpie Lark. A regular, common and conspicuous species in and around Canberra; large flock in winter for feeding and roosting.

Eastern Shrike-Tit. One nest on Long Gully Road received eggs probably in mid-December.

Eastern Whipbird. Laying started in a nest at Lee's Creek in the Ranges on October 26, 1964.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike. Common in summer, scarce in winter. Small, apparently migratory flocks in late April and May.

Little Cuckoo-Shrike. One May 30, another June 6, 1965, both in Canberra.

White-winged Triller. Arrival not recorded, but laying began in a loose colony near Black Mt. on December 2, 1964. In other years males have apparently left early in the New Year. More observations needed on this species.

Spotted Quail-Thrush. Rather rare, but found in dry sclerophyll about Canberra, e.g. Duntroon Gunnery Range, and up to 4,000 ft. in the Ranges.

Ground Thrush. Common in the Ranges. One on the Cotter Road December 28, 1964, one in the Botanical Gardens on June 19, 1965, and one in the pines at Scrivener Dam on June 20, 1965, which suggest some post-breeding dispersal.

White-fronted Chat. Not common, but seen near water in small flocks in winter.

White-throated Warbler. First arrival October 5, 1964; first eggs laid on November 11, 1964.

Western Warbler. First arrival October 4, 1964; one nest on Mt. Mugga received eggs about November 1.

Brown Weebill. Fairly common always around the City area, Mt. Pleasant, Red Hill; less often elsewhere.

Eastern Whiteface. Not common, but recorded in all seasons in open country.

Striated Thornbill. Abundant wherever there are trees; only one nest recorded, eggs laid about October 15.

Little Thornbill. Rather rare; associates with Cootamundra Wattles round the City area.

Brown Thornbill. First recorded nest must have received eggs in late August of early September, but laying continued till mid-November.

Buff-tailed Thornbill. More restricted in habitat than other Thornbills, mostly at margins of woodland and often in open forest. Earliest eggs laid on September 8, but laying continued till early December.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill. Common among winter flocks in Canberra. Eggs laid from late August to about 20 November. The drought has reduced its numbers.

White-browed Scrub-Wren. Common in forest country with good ground cover, especially in the Ranges. Any adult female, banded at Glendale Crossing, retrapped at Pine Island three weeks later, 19 miles direct and the longest recorded movement for this species.

Speckled Warbler. Laying known on Black Mt. from September 5 to November 1, 1964, in and at the edge of open forest.

Rufous Songlark. Arrival and departure not recorded; less numerous than usual.

Little Grassbird. Many round Lake Burley Griffin as it filled; not recorded there since.

Australian Reed Warbler. Arrival and departure not recorded. Very common as Lake Burley Griffin filled; fairly common on swamp at east end of Lake in the summer.

Cisticola. Common while Lake Burley Griffin filled and before on Molonglo flood-plain, breeding; a few records since throughout the year.

Superb Blue-Wren. First recorded eggs about September 20.

White-browed Wood-Swallow. Flocks of 30, 30, 50 and 70 over Canberra on October 22, 1964, flying north and north-west.

Dusky Wood-Swallow. Present from September 9, 1964 to early May 1965; laying started about November 1.

Orange-winged Sitella. Three birds building one nest in the Botanical Gardens in late August. In two other nests, started about November 1 and 15 on Mt. Mugga, five or six adults fed the brooding bird and the young.

Brown Treecreeper. Locally common in partly cleared land with dead timber.

White-throated Treecreeper. Resident, widespread in wooded areas.

Red-browed Treecreeper. Regular in small numbers in the Ranges.

Mistletoe-bird. Apparently migratory from August 27, 1964, to late autumn. One nest on Black Mt. received eggs on December 11.

Spotted Pardalote. A mysterious species; always present throughout the area, but fairly large migrations noted in the Ranges and at Lake George in April 1965; bred in the Ranges along the roads.

Yellow-tipped Pardalote. Recorded in the Ranges in April 1965 and around Canberra in winter; apparently one of the few birds visiting the area from the south.

Striated Pardalote. A few records throughout the year.

Eastern Striated Pardalote. Always common in open forest and in the Ranges.

Eastern Silvereeye. Numbers arriving in March and April were smaller than usual, possibly because of the drought; winter numbers in 1965 also lower; bred sparingly.

White-naped Honeyeater. The usual large migratory movements occurred in the Ranges and in open country round Canberra during September/November and April/May; bred abundantly in the Ranges.

Brown-headed Honeyeater. Regular in small mobile flocks throughout the area; bred on Black Mt. in the tops of gums.

Eastern Spinebill. Present in summer throughout the area, but more common in the Ranges; apparently restricted to city gardens in winter. Appears to move along the Murrumbidgee River in autumn, as individuals and not in flocks, but these movements are not understood; breeding not recorded, but presumably occurs. More information needed all round.

Painted Honeyeater. Breeding areas along Murrumbidgee River not visited this year.

Singing Honeyeater. One at Angle Crossing on September 26, 1964.

Regent Honeyeater. One at Pine Island October 10, 1964; regular at the Rifle Range in December and January; two flocks of 20 each on Mt. Pleasant February 27, 1965; and several records in late April and early May in Hackett.

Fuscous Honeyeater. An unusual irruption from August to November 1964 seen wherever grevillias were in flower. Birds banded in the Botanical Gardens were retrapped up to 8 weeks later; most showed signs of immaturity; all disappeared suddenly in mid-November. No breeding records. Juveniles again banded in April and May 1965. This migration of juveniles does not appear to have been noticed elsewhere.

Yellow-faced Honeyeater. First eggs laid on Black Mt. November 8, but probably no laying after January 1 near Canberra, whereas in Ranges nests probably started later and certainly laying continued to mid-January. The usual large migrations occurred in the Ranges and over open country round Canberra in September and October 1964 and in April and May 1965. Few stayed in winter 1965.

White-eared Honeyeater. Regular in the Ranges but more common in the summer; common about Canberra in winter.

Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. Occasional in Canberra in early spring and in late autumn or winter.

White-plumed Honeyeater. Regular in open forest.

Crescent Honeyeater. Fairly common in the Ranges but less so in winter; occasional in Canberra in July to September 1964 and May and June 1965.

New Holland Honeyeater. Possibly fewer than 3-4 years ago. Records in Canberra on July 25, August 16, 29, 1964 and May 8, June 19, 1965; in spring along the Murrumbidgee where it breeds; in summer and autumn in the Ranges.

Noisy Miner. Small resident populations at Hackett, on the Weetangera road, the Mugga Road and the Cooma Road.

Red Wattle-bird. Regular in Canberra; fairly common in the Ranges in summer.

Little Wattle-bird. One in Forrest in early January 1965.

Noisy Friarbird. First arrival September 26, 1964; fairly common in open forest till April.

Pipit. Breeding started in paddocks west of Black Mt. in the first half of October.

Diamond Firetail. A few summer records near Canberra; winter status uncertain.

Zebra Finch. Only reported in small flocks from the Duntroon area, the east end of Lake Burley Griffin and near Mulwala House.

Banded Finch. Possibly increasing slowly; regular near the city, e.g. Botanical Gardens, Black Mt.

Red-browed Finch. Apparently badly affected by the drought; now rather rare in open forest.

Olive-backed Oriole. One September 19, 1964 and apparently bred successfully in the Rifle Range area in December/January.

Satin Bowerbird. Regular in the Ranges in small numbers.

Raven. Regular and common.

White-winged Chough. The only regular species of the pine forests; also regular in open forest.

Pied Currawong. A few pairs remained in Canberra during the summer; much more common in the Ranges. For winter occurrence see separate report.

Grey Currawong. Regular in small numbers throughout the area.

Grey Butcher-bird. Probably bred near Mt. Mugga October/November 1964; occasional elsewhere. Appeared in the Ranges from March 30.

Black-backed Magpie. Regular and common, except in the Ranges.

White-backed Magpie. Occasional, perhaps hybrids.

Blackbird. Common in the older gardens of the city; also breeds on Black Mt.

Skylark. Regular and fairly common in grassland.

Goldfinch. Regular and common round Canberra.

Greenfinch. One May 11, 1965, feeding on ground with native species.

Starling. Regular and common.

PIED CURRAWONG ENQUIRY

by S. Marchant

During the winter of 1965 it was decided to organise a co-operative enquiry by members of the A.C.T. Branch of the R.A.O.U. and other interested people into the status and habits of the Pied Currawong (Strepera graculina) in the Canberra city area. The objects were to get some more accurate idea of the numbers of these birds visiting the area during winter, their daily distribution, food and roosting places, as well as to encourage local observers to take part in this sort of enquiry, in the belief that thus more active field work could be developed in the A.C.T.

The enquiry ran from April to mid-September and was intended originally to consist of counts throughout the city area about once a month, as well as any records on food, general habits, directions of flight to and from roosts and roosting behaviour, which participants were prepared to make throughout the period.

In the event reasonable support was forthcoming and as a whole the exercise may be regarded as a limited success. The short-comings are chiefly attributable to the organiser who failed in his duties during July and who should probably have modified the terms of the enquiry as it progressed and as the pattern of behaviour became a little plainer.

It is a pleasure, however, to acknowledge the help and information provided by the following, all of whom contributed observations or took part regularly or at least once in the organised counts: - Ian Betts, Ken Campbell, C.R. Crutwell, Peter Davidson, Ian Grant, Miss C. Harding, W.B. Hitchcock, K.M. Kennedy and family, W.A. Martin, R. Schoode, B.H. Stinear, A.R. Taysom, H.M. Tischhoff.

Daytime Numbers

Although a few pairs remain and presumably breed in and around Canberra during the summer (e.g. Black Mt., Forrest area), numbers increase gradually in autumn. First arrivals were noted in the Braddon-Turner-O'Connor area between 11 and 29 March, these being areas where the birds are not normally seen in the summer. The first flock of about 50 was noted in Forrest on 16 April and smaller parties had been seen near Civic Centre since 27 March.

Four counts were organised between 1100 and 1200 hours on 16 May, 13 June, 15 August, 12 September. That of 15 August was somewhat of a failure because of bad weather and the only areas covered adequately were Yarralumla, Deakin, Forrest, Red Hill, Kingston, Acton, Turner and Hackett. On the other occasions nearly the whole city area was covered except for Watson, Downer, Dickson and Ainslie which were never visited, while the Campbell-Duntroon area was not investigated on 16 May. The following totals were counted:

May	800 - 850
June	400 - 450
August	500 - 550
September	100 - 150

I became quite clear after the first day that an accurate census of the birds in built-up areas with many large trees is very difficult. Although they occur in loose flocks, there is so much dispersal over several acres, so much movement in and out of the trees, and so many birds will remain hidden in the trees, that the number of birds actually seen is only probably a rough minimum approximation of those present.

The count of 16 May was probably the most complete and accurate and it is interesting that a count of birds flying to roost at the Scrivener Dam on the same evening gave 1072 which provides a reasonable confirmation of the numbers in the city area (see below for further discussion).

The poor total in June was probably because the Yarralumla nursery area was not properly investigated and this seems to be one of the most favoured areas. In August numbers had probably begun to drop, but the total was low because of the bad weather; and in September certainly only a few birds were left in the city area. At 1615 hours 20 September a scattered party of 20-30 birds were circling up above St. John's Church with much calling and then diving down into the trees by Reid House. This was unusual behaviour and perhaps indicated restlessness associated with departure for the breeding areas.

Distribution

It was probably a mistake not to vary the time of day at which counts were made, but for the late morning at any rate it is safe to say that the birds are not uniformly distributed throughout Canberra. Very few birds were ever reported in Hackett, O'Connor, Lyneham, Downer, Watson, Dickson, Campbell, Narrabundah, Red Hill or Deakin though during June and July some small parties totalling about 30 birds were regularly seen in Hackett at the foot of Mt. Majura. It was plain that they preferred areas which had plenty of mature trees whether or not these areas were built-up. In fact their chief strong-holds were the Yarralumla Nursery and Royal Canberra Golf Club area, between the American and French Embassies, Mugga Way, Flinders Way, Canberra Avenue and State Circle, and in the Government Triangle. Somewhat smaller concentrations occurred round

the War Memorial, in the Turner-Acton area and at Telopea Park and Kingston. They were never noted in areas of natural bush, such as Capital Hill and along the lake side by Coronation Drive.

General Habits and Food

Most birds consorted in scattered flocks which probably day after day resort to the same area. The size of these flocks was probably between 30 and 100 and they were regularly noted in the areas mentioned above: elsewhere only smaller parties or scattered birds were recorded.

Characteristically they frequent the larger trees and seemed to spend their time flying from them to the ground and back again, drifting leisurely along and feeding intermittently. Attention is usually attracted by their calls, but by own impression is that calling increases as the season advances. It seemed that on 15 August it was particularly intense, though this could have been induced by the wet weather, because on that day there seemed to be less activity between trees and ground and many birds just sat in the trees calling.

They were recorded as eating grapes, pinoak acorns, lerps and spider cocoons on 16 May; pin oak acorns again, but more commonly *Pyracanthus* berries on 13 June; and *Pyracanthus* berries still on 15 and 25 August. On 14 September a bird was seen at the P.O. in Alinga Street carrying a naked young bird in its foot. Possibly this young bird was a feral pigeon. Throughout the winter they were often noted digging on lawns, no doubt for grubs, and were also noted on 13 June feeding on newly turned soil at the Yarralumla Nurseries.

Roosting

It was discovered early in the enquiry that many birds were flying westwards over Hughes and Curtin in the evening and from 16 May several counts were made at the Scrivener Dam in the last hour before dark. The results were: 1072 on 16 May, 1538 on 11 July and 592 on 21 August, which are regarded as being accurate to within 5% and on 23 July the movement was recorded as being of hundreds of birds.

The birds approached in waves over the pine trees by Government House and continued into and along the pines on the other side of the Molonglo. In the two later counts good numbers could be seen through binoculars heading in the same direction far away over Curtin, though the majority passed much closer to or over the Dam. The birds flew at perhaps 500 feet or more over open country, but those which came over Government House usually approached only a few feet above the tree tops and then gained height when they left the trees to cross the Molonglo. The earliest and latest arrivals appeared to be in loose flocks with, say, 50 birds passing and then a lull, but such apparent flocks became confused in the middle period of the movement when 40-50 birds were passing per minute. This suggests that the feeding flocks move to roost together.

It was never established precisely where the birds stayed for the night, but it must be in the pine plantations stretching from the Scrivener Dam to Mt. Stromlo. On 19 April in the hour before dark a few tens of birds were found in the pines directly west of the Dam and near the hill-top; they were well scattered, settled singly in the tops of the trees and called loudly and continuously, but had either fallen silent or moved on before total darkness.

On several occasions in April and May between 1730 and 1800 hours a few birds were noted flying north or north-west over the Stromlo Forestry Settlement into the pines. No birds were seen to pass down the Molonglo at Coppins Crossing on 6 June between 1600 and 1645 hours, but a few were flying west into Stromlo at 1655 hours. On 20 June between 1610 and 1705 hours good numbers of birds were passing leisurely along the pines westwards from the Dam. Most birds would settle for a time on the top of a pine, call loudly and then fly on again; none or few appeared to stay in the pines close to the Dam.

Thus, until midwinter or even until mid-July, it is reasonable to suppose that most of the birds visiting Canberra by day roosted somewhere in the pines towards Stromlo. The agreement between the numbers counted in the city area during the day and at the Dam in the evening on 16 May support this. In late July and later, however, several observers suspected or noted different behaviour. During July about 100 birds were noted to cross Red Hill and fly south till out of sight (there is, of course, a pine plantation in that direction on Long Gully Road), but by mid-August this movement had stopped and two observers noted that the birds were concentrating in the evenings between Monaro Crescent and Red Hill and perhaps roosting around the Canberra Boys Grammar School or below the Red Hill Look-out. At about the same time some birds were in Telopea Park until it was almost dark and on 22 August about 30-50 birds were flying about and calling in a group of tall gums in the park until 1745 hours or very nearly dark. Presumably they stayed there for the night.

Thus it is probable that in the last half of the winter some feeding flocks stay to roost in suitably tall, dense trees in the city area; and this would help to

account for the low numbers passing the dam on 21st August, though at the same time some birds were probably leaving the area because they were more often seen in August near Uriarra and elsewhere to the west than in earlier months.

On 1 June at 1600 - 1630 hours 30-40 birds passed south westward over the shoulder of Black Mt. and on 19th June at 0705 hrs a similar number flew over the Botanical Gardens northeastward. This suggests that early in the winter even the few birds in north Canberra during the day roosted in the Molonglo-Stromlo pines. Yet the regular record during June and July, in Hackett of about 30 birds which appeared soon after dawn and gradually moved south or west by 0800 hrs. does suggest that there may have been a small roost somewhere north-east of the city throughout the winter.

It is also interesting to record that other species pass the dam in the evening flying west presumably to roost. Crimson and Eastern Rosellas, King Parrots, Goshawks, Mudlarks and Blackbirds are the most prominent.

Summary and Discussion

Although much additional and more accurate information about this species in Canberra could be obtained without a lot of effort this enquiry has served to establish the following points with reasonable probability.

1. The birds begin to return to Canberra about mid-March, and numbers build up till there are about 1000 present in mid-May.
2. Peak numbers in about July are probably about 2000.
3. Loose feeding flocks are scattered throughout suitable areas, which seem to require plenty of tall, and reasonably dense trees either in park land or built-up areas. Newly developed areas

without such trees are largely avoided, as perhaps are remnants of natural bush.

4. Until the middle of the year most if not all the birds present in Canberra during the day probably roost in the pines between the Scrivener Dam and Mt. Stromlo; in July and later subsidiary roosts may develop in other pine plantations and probably as the season advances more and more birds stay to roost in Canberra itself.
5. Practically all the visitors have left by mid-September though a few pairs stay to breed in and around the city.

The question whence the birds come and whether they go to breed remains unanswered. There are no banding recoveries to help.

The species breeds commonly in summer throughout the high country of southeastern Australia and presumably leaves the breeding areas to a great extent during winter. One assumes, therefore, that all the Canberra birds come from the highlands nearby. They could, in fact, merely move down from the Brindabella Ranges which are amply large enough to supply all the winter population of the city.

It may be noted that J.E. Walsh (The Australian Bird Bander 3 (3): 1965: p.53) records a single recovery of birds banded during the winter at Mittagong, on 31 August from near Goulburn. It may, in fact, be quite wrong to suppose that the winter population at Canberra is sedentary and derived from breeding areas nearby.