



Canberra bird notes

No.1 July 1968

The Canberra Bird Notes is being produced as a news letter for members of the Canberra Branch of the R.A.O.U. and other interested persons. It is intended purely as an informal medium of communication and does not constitute a recognised journal.

Publication will be every three months and numbering of issues will be consecutive, without volumes. Each issue will be page numbered separately.

In order to defray the costs of publication and distribution, it will be necessary to charge an annual subscription of \$1.00. Subscriptions should be sent to the Secretary, Mr. G. Chapman, Flat 7 356 Northbourne Avenue, Dickson, A.C.T. 2602. This issue is being distributed free to all previous recipients of the Monthly Newsletter but future issues will only be sent to subscribers.

The present issue may be a little larger than those to follow. This depends on the material we receive. However, the primary function will be to keep local members in touch with the latest ornithological news and all issues will contain notification of future meetings, notes on past meetings, observations, reviews, R.A.O.U. Notices and articles of general interest. If you find this issue interesting and you wish to help Canberra Bird Notes flourish, please send us notes, observations or other items of interest - the editors have no wish to be the authors too.

FIELD OUTING TO THE PULLETOP FAUNA RESERVE OCTOBER 1967

Thirteen local members and friends undertook the 500 mile return journey to the Pulletop Fauna Reserve on the weekend 21-22 October, 1967. They were Messrs. I. Betts, T, Stokes, B. Baker, M. Nicholas, J, Bywater, M. Clayton, J, McNaughton, Dr. & Mrs. P, Fullagar, Mr, & Mrs. W. Reyenga, Miss P, Watts (now Mrs, Chapman!) and Mr. G. Chapman.

A succession of drought years had resulted in the mallee being in a very poor state and there were very few shrub species fruiting or flowering. Consequently, the overall numbers of birds were low but the total of 63 species seen was about average for the area. The highlight of the trip was the finding by John Bywater of the rare Red-lored Whistler-at its nest. Pulletop is the only area in N.S.W. where this species has been recorded and at the present rate of clearing of the surrounding mallee, the reserve will soon finish up as a little 450 acre island of mallee amongst endless wheat fields. Unless steps are taken quickly to conserve larger areas of suitable habitat, the chances of survival of this rare species are slight. The following species were either seen in the reserve or the surrounding wheat crops and fallows during the two days.

Emu One small group seen on fallow.

Brown Goshawk Seen twice in the reserve.

Wedge-tailed Eagle Three sightings.

Peregrine Falcon Two sightings.

Brown Hawk Found nesting in a Kurrajong tree in a cleared area north of the Reserve. Nest contained one egg on October 22nd.

Mallee Fowl Frequently seen in the reserve. Several active mounds were also seen. The well known mound on the fence not far from the hut was not being used for the first time for several years.

Peaceful Dove Seen once.

Common Bronzewing Four seen on Saturday, one on Sunday.

Crested Pigeon Only one sighting.

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo Three seen in wheat crop on Sat. A bird was sitting on a nest not far from the hut in a large hollow of a dead tree 15 feet up, unclimbable because of a bees' nest lower down.

Galah Flocks seen as well as pairs. Seen at nest hollow.

Cockatiel Eight seen on Sat. 21st, flying overhead.

Ringnecked Parrot Only two.

Red-rumped Parrot Only two seen.

Blue Bonnet One only.

Mulga Parrot Only two seen, outside the reserve. The small numbers of parrots seen were probably because there are very few mature trees with suitable nesting hollows in or near the reserve.

Pallid Cuckoo Seen twice.

Tawny Frogmouth A single bird was found sitting on a nest about 12 feet high in a very spindly mallee near the hut. The nest contained one egg on Sat. 21st.

Owlet Nightjar A single bird flew from a small hollow about 200 yards west of the hut.

Laughing Kookaburra A single sighting.

Rainbow Bird 20+ seen flying. No sign of nesting.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike One pair, flying over.

Southern Scrub Robin Judging from singing birds, there seemed to be two or perhaps three pairs in the reserve. This species invariably prefers areas where the Broom Bush, *Melaleuca uncinata* is dominant. A nest found on Sat. 21st, contained a single nestling about a week old. It was placed at the base of a small broom bush amongst fallen twigs.

Chestnut Quail-thrush Two seen on Saturday and one on Sunday, This very elusive species is very hard to locate until one becomes acquainted with its very high pitched call, It seems to prefer re-growth areas.

White-browed Babbler Several groups were seen. In the reserve, their nests are commonly found in the stunted Mallee Pine, *Callitris verrucosa*. A nest with 2 eggs was seen on Saturday 21st, and a pair with two flying young.

Brown Songlark One bird recorded out in the open fields.

Black-backed Wren) About four parties in the reserve.

Purple Backed Wren) These two species were recorded in about equal numbers. No sign of nesting.

Western Warbler Frequently heard in the reserve. Two birds were observed building a nest in the leaves of a sapling mallee near the hut on Sat. 21st.

Little Thornbill Frequent sightings.

Red-tailed Thornbill Seen mainly in pairs. Pulletop birds have very faint breast markings and unfamiliar observers could easily confuse them with the following species.

Chestnut-tailed Thornbill Frequent in the reserve. They feed more on the ground than the preceding species. Seen carrying nesting material on Saturday 21st.

Yellow-tailed Thornbill Three seen on Saturday and 4 on Sunday, all in open areas adjacent to reserve.

Brown Weebill Probably the most common small warbler in the mallee. Two nests were found, one with three recently dead young and another with young being fed.

Mallee Heath-wren One Sat. 21st, a pair was seen feeding recent fledgling. Two more single birds were seen on Sunday.

Red-capped Robin Frequently observed. A nest with two eggs was found on Sat. 21st built only 4 feet from the ground in hanging, bark

Hooded Robin Four sightings.

Southern Yellow Robin Only one seen.

Grey Fantail Noted as common. Probably conspicuous species such as this appear to be more numerous than other species because they are so easily seen.

Willie Wagtail Common. A bird was seen sitting on a nest too high to inspect on Sat. 21st.

Restless Flycatcher Seen twice.

Golden Whistler Seen once.

Rufous Whistler Heard continually and frequently Red-
lored Whistler No fewer than five pairs of this rare species were resident in the reserve. On Saturday 21st, a nest containing two eggs was found five feet up amongst shedding bark in the lowest fork of a mallee tree. The bird sitting was presumably a sub-adult, because it was lacking much of the cinnamon-rufous coloration on the breast and belly which characterises both sexes when adult. This species has no doubt been present in the area for many years but has not generally been detected because of its elusive habits in Spring. The best way to find Red-lored Whistlers is to become familiar with their call, which is quite like a slower, lower version of that used to "whistle a dog". For those who possess the Gould League's record, 'Birds of the Outback', the second half of the band labelled Gilbert Whistler is, in fact, a Red-lored Whistler which was recorded quite near Pulletop. On hearing the call, which is varied in intensity considerably, thus making it difficult to decide the point of origin, one must move quickly towards the bird. When disturbed, they fly low to the ground in a straight line away from the observer

and usually out of sight. However, at fairly close range they will respond well to a fair imitation of the call, and if a tape recorder playback is used, they will respond very well. The bird spends most of its time feeding on the ground and low down in fallen rubbish and in this respect resembles the Grey Shrike-thrush rather than the 'other members of the genus Pachycephala. In this respect, it is also worth noticing the fact that the sexes are similar and that the nest is also built much heavier and "thrush" like.

So far, the Red-lored Whistler has only been recorded either at, or within a five mile radius of Pulletop in scattered patches of mallee, and that which is still standing is being cleared at an alarming rate. The species enjoys a somewhat more extensive range on the S.A./Vic border near

Pinnaroo but it must surely be listed as one of the rarest species to occur in S.E. Australia, and certainly in immediate danger of extinction in N.S.W. Nest records made in the Pulletop area have indicated that the species is not at all successful.

Gilbert's Whistler It was estimated that there were also about five pairs of this species in the reserve. It shares with the Southern Scrub-robin, the preference for areas of Broom Bush, where it is very hard to see. One pair had a territory centred on a group of Mallee Pine where there were quite a few old babbler's nests. Babbler's nests are sometimes used as a base for the nest of this species, but none was found.

Grey Shrike-thrush Frequently recorded, A nest with one egg was found on Saturday 21st.

Crested Bell-bird Not often seen, but the beautiful notes of this species, mainly at dawn, were a constant reminder of its presence.

Striated Pardalote Only one observation.

Yellow-tailed Pardalote Several sightings. A pair was seen at a nest burrow tunnelled into the ground at the base of a mallee but the state of the nest was uncertain.

Striped Honeyeater There seemed to be about four pairs in the reserve.

White-eared Honeyeater Common. This was the most numerous amongst the various species of honeyeater which regularly came to drink at the water tank by the hut.

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater Common. Several nests were found at all stages from building to feeding the young.

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater An interesting observation was the feeding by a pair Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters of two fledglings of this species as well as the rightful parents.

Peewee Seen outside the reserve along the road.

White-winged Chough Probably no fewer than four groups inhabit the reserve. A nest with 5 eggs was seen near the hut on Sat. 21st, and another group was seen building the following day.

Apostle Bird Does not occur in the mallee proper, but a group was seen near the dam at the western end of the reserve.

Pied Butcher-bird Heard only, calling out in the open paddock north of the reserve.

Grey Butcher-bird A single juvenile seen in the reserve.

Black-backed Magpie Only two seen on the open paddock.

Australian Raven There seem to be two nesting territories in the reserve. Often seen flying low over the mallee.

Little Raven Only recorded flying high overhead.

RECENT MEETINGSJune 12th

Our experimental "Brains Trust" evening was well attended and questions on various topics asked by members of the audience were answered by the panel, Messrs S.J. Wilson, G. Chapman and Drs. P.J. Fullagar and G.F. van Tets. The session was quite a lively one and it eventually had to be terminated for want of time. The success of the venture will no doubt prompt the committee into making the Brains Trust evening an annual event.

July 10th

Owing to the illness of the scheduled speaker, Mr David Purchase kindly agreed at short notice to speak a month earlier than originally planned. His address entitled "The Skuas on Macquarie Island" was based on his study of the factors controlling population growth of the Southern Skua, Catharacta skua lonbergi, carried out on Macquarie Island, during 1963/66.

Pairs occupy breeding, but not feeding, territories, and there is-a considerable non-breeding surplus. Two eggs are always laid, but in 80% of instances, only one chick is raised.

Results have shown how production, both in the weight and number of chicks fledged, is proportionate to the availability of food. Territory size increases as food supply decreases, indicating that territoriality in this species acts as a major factor in regulating population growth and prevents over-exploitation of food resources. It is suggested that the laying of two eggs where usually only one chick is reared gives a reserve of breeding potential for the exploitation of any increase in food resources, or for the rapid build-up of a declining population brought about by a food shortage or other such calamity.

COMING MEETINGSWednesday, August 14th

8.00 p.m., C.S.I.R.O. Lecture Theatre. Mr. J.M. Forshaw will speak on "Extinct Parrots of the World".

Wednesday September 11th

8.00 p.m., C.S.I.R.O. Lecture Theatre. Major H. Bell, who has recently returned from New Guinea and who is at present stationed in Canberra, will speak on New Guinea Birds.

Meetings finish about 9.30 p.m. when informal supper and discussion follow. Visitors welcome.

NOTE - There will be no monthly meeting held in October because of the R.A.O.U. Annual Congress.

NOTICE OF R.A.O.U. ANNUAL CONGRESS

Non-members who have not received the R.A.O.U. notice paper are welcome to attend the Annual Congress which will be held from October 12th to 15th inclusive.

Registration must be made on the appropriate forms available from the Branch Secretary Mr. G. Chapman (phone 4-4328 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.). Full details are supplied with the registration form but briefly the programme is as follows:

Saturday 12th October - 10.00 a.m. Official opening by Her Excellency, the Lady Casey, followed by Annual Meeting and viewing of Art exhibition.

6.30 p.m. Barbeque to be held at C.S.I.R.O. Gungahlin the following three days will be taken up with morning seminars and presentation of papers in the afternoons. Afternoon outings will also be conducted and any member familiar with local birds who would like

to act as leader for an outing, should contact the Branch Secretary, It is anticipated that many of Australia's leading ornithologists will be present at the Congress, in fact, many of them will be speaking.

An exhibition of Australian Ornithological Art will be held in conjunction with the Congress. Anyone who wishes to exhibit paintings or photographs, historical or recent, is invited to contact Mr. E. Slater at C.S.I.R.O. Division of Wildlife Research (4-4328) who will supply full details.

CANBERRA PIGEONS ARE IN THE NEWS

Those who have never seen the Crested (Topknot) Pigeon Ocyphaps lophotes, may be interested to learn that a small party has been resident around the Gungahlin area for some time. A drive down the road to the crematorium will more than likely pass them feeding by the roadside. Last year the party was only four, but two juveniles suddenly appeared indicating a successful nesting, Recently, as many as 12 have been seen. The closest place this species could be seen to Canberra until about 1966 was the Burrinjuck Dam. Members are asked to keep a good lookout and report any other local sightings so that we can accurately record what may well be an increase in numbers and extension of range.

Recent banding in Canberra of numbers of feral Domestic Pigeons, Columba livia by CSIRO staff has resulted in a recovery from Eden on the south coast. The bird was banded as an adult at Lyneham on 7th September 1966 by Tony d'Andria and was caught at Eden, N.S.W. on 9th June 1968. The distance and direction between the two points is 133 miles S.S.E. This is the first movement of any distance yet recorded by the Australian Bird-Banding Scheme for this species even though 320 have now been banded.

Subscribers are advised that the 1967/68 Annual Bird Report for Canberra will be published in a future issue of Canberra Bird Notes.

BOOK REVIEW

"Birds of Australia" by Stanley Breeden and Peter Slater, Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney. 144 pp, 11" x 8". Over 200 photographs, 26 of these in colour. \$5.50.

This is basically a picture book aimed at the general reader and as such, must surely rate as one of the best yet produced in this country. Typical chapters are titled Courtship and Nesting, Raising the Young, Feeding Habits, At Night and In Rainforests. Each one of these chapters is supported with photographs depicting a variety of species, together with some fine drawings by Peter Slater.

The colour plates in most cases are very well executed by the Australian printers, reminding us that this art is not totally lost in this country, although various publishers are turning more towards the orient lately for their colour work, with variable results. Perhaps the choice of subjects could have been more wisely made, as many of the species depicted in colour have been covered very well recently in other publications.

The most annoying aspect is that the magnificent cover photo of the Splendid Wren is but cunning window-dressing. The same bird is illustrated in the book on page 111 in a much smaller and very poor reproduction.

It is a shame that in a book with so much black and white content, that the quality of the photographs is not good, obviously because the originals were mainly colour transparencies. This is no fault of the authors for the fact is that good black and white photographs are hard to come by these days, despite the fact that there is still a keen demand. However, the monochromes quite adequately illustrate the points they refer to and will please all those except the keen photographer.

The text is very pleasantly written with a good deal of original material included. However, the piecemeal arrangement of the text amongst the long captions and photographs is confusing. Two misleading statements came

to notice, namely the failure to admit New Guinea to the range of both the Honeyeaters and Fairy Wrens and the statement that the nest and eggs the Eyrean Grass-wren had never been found, whereas it was well depicted in a photograph on P.167 of Vol.1 of the Australian Bird Watcher. Members of the genus Strepera are referred to as "bell-magpies" on page 5 and currawongs on page 7 with no cross reference. Maybe the printer was running short on capital letters or perhaps the lack of capital letters in the vernacular names throughout the text is a result of modern educational trends, but interestingly enough, they are retained in the captions.

Despite these small anomalies, this book presents a very pleasing appearance and is well worth the moderate outlay.

R.A.U.O. NOTICES

Latest news from Melbourne lists expected publication dates for Vol.68 of "The Emu", now overdue.

Part 1 End of July Part 3 October-November

Part 2 September Part 4 December

It has come to our notice that quite a few members missed out on recent parts of "The Emu". This has largely been brought about by the uncertain production schedule of "The Emu" and confusion of members as to their financial position. Anyone who has not yet received Parts 3 & 4 of Volo67 (bound together) and consider themselves financial, please contact the Branch Secretary.

The reprint edition of the Checklist of the Birds of Australia (2nd Edition) is now available from the State Library of S.A., North Terrace, Adelaide, at \$4 per copy. A total of 5,000 have been printed. The amendments are not included.

Editors - G. Chapman and D. Purchase, C/- CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, Box 109, P.O., Canberra City.
Published by the A.C.T. Branch of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union.