



Canberra bird notes

No.5 Sept. 1969

EDITORIAL

As the new editor of Canberra Bird Notes, I should like to say how pleased I am with this appointment, and to express my determination to maintain the high standard which our publication has already reached.

It is also gratifying to be able to say that contributions from members have begun to trickle in. In fact, some have had to be held over until next issue. Contributions will normally be published in the order in which they are received. In cases where the subject is of immediate interest, however, priority will be given.

Graeme and Pamela Chapman left Canberra for Perth last month. Graeme was the pioneer-editor of CBN, and he has been the hard working Branch Secretary for more than four years. During a social function at "Gungahlin" we presented Graeme with an inscribed pewter tankard on behalf of all Branch members. We wish the Chapmans good luck and good birding in the West.

THE PLUMAGE OF RED WATTLE-BIRDS

Ellen M. McCulloch

Mention was made in the June issue of CBN of Red Wattle-Bird plumage (Chapman, p.5), and I offer the following observations.

I have numbers of Red Wattle-Birds Anthochaera carunculata coming to my garden nectar-feeder all the year round. In September or October young birds (usually in pairs) may accompany adults. They are fed on insects and beakfuls of nectar, and after much trial and error finally learn to drink from the feeder.

On October 7, 1968 two young birds (pair A) accompanied one adult, and were fed by the adult. Both called continually and noisily and had a pale yellow gape showing conspicuously at the 'hinge' when the beak was closed. The inside of the beak and mouth were bright orange-red. They were considerably smaller than the adult and had very short tails and buffy edges to the primaries, while some of the breast feathers were quite fluffy. The abdomen was yellow. There were no signs of any wattles and the area of facial skin which shows creamy in adults was pale blue-grey. They were seen intermittently in the garden, usually attracting attention by their calls.

On October 21, another pair of young birds (pair B) accompanied two adults to the feeder. They had pale yellow gapes and no visible wattles, and appeared to be at much the same stage as were pair A when they first visited the garden. Pair A also visited the feeder on October 21, still smaller than adult size. They showed a less conspicuous creamy 'hinge' at the gape, and both had small pale pink wattles showing.

None of these birds were banded, but it seems clear that before these particular young birds attained adult plumage the red wattles, though small, were clearly visible.

During early June, 1969 an adult bird with the right wattle missing started coming regularly to the feeder, and has continued coining each day till the time of writing (July 13).

6, Bullen Avenue, Mitcham, Vic.

INDIAN MYNAS IN CANBERRA

There are indications that the Indian Myna, *Acridotheres tristis* is gaining a toehold in the Canberra district. A report of two at Lyneham in November last year was described in CBN No. 2 as the first record for Canberra, but it has since been antedated by Professor D. G. Catcheside of Acton who observed two in Campbell on May 26, 1968. The Catchesides have also records of one four miles west of Yass on July 4, 1968, and at least one at Acton later in the year.

More recently, Mark Clayton saw two Indian Mynas at Narrabundah on July 12, 1969 and heard one calling there on July 26. Others were heard calling near Lyneham shops in August, and two were seen in Mackennal Street, Lyneham, on August 4. Is it possible that these Canberra Records all involve one highly peregrinating pair?

A summary of the Myna's history in Australia appears in Cayley (1963). The bird is now well established and common in and around Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Townsville.

Apparently, opinion is divided as to whether this exotic species should be regarded as a pest. The Myna is mainly a

scavenger and does not appear to be competing with any native species. What do readers of Canberra Bird Notes think? Will the Indian Myna be welcome in Canberra? Send us your views.

Reference

Cayley, N.W. 1963. What Bird is That? 3rd Ed. Sydney, Angus & Robertson.

BIRDS IN THE NEWS

The Canberra Times of July 1, 1969, carried a front page photograph of two youths holding up a dead Wedge tailed Eagle *Aquila audax*. They had seen the bird flying low with a rabbit-trap dangling from one leg, chased it for two miles over rough country and killed it with a shovel. A spokesman for the Department of the Interior said that, although eagles are protected within the A.C.T., no action would be taken on this occasion because the boys had killed the bird to put it out of its misery. A letter to the Editor from Miss V. Statham, published two days later, made the valid point that if the eagle had been able to fly two miles, rabbit-trap and all, it probably would have recovered fully if the trap had just been removed, and did not have to be killed. The SPCA should have been called in.

A somewhat cheerier picture on July 9 showed an adult Masked Owl *Tyto novaehollandiae* surrounded by young children at a university kindergarten in Perth. The owl had been found with a broken wing and was being treated by the university's senior lecturer in anatomy.

WARBLER/WASP NESTING ASSOCIATIONS

Anthony Stokes

In January 1967, I found the nest of a Western Warbler *Gerygone fusca* in an exotic tree with moderately thick foliage standing in a grove of various cosmopolitan species in the Duntroon Rifle Range, A.C.T. The bird entered and left its nest twice while under observation.

Sited approximately five feet from the ground, the nest was hanging from a horizontal branch near the perimeter of the tree. About six inches away, on another branch, was the nest of a Common Paper-wasp *Polistes variabilis* with one of its occupants on it.

I believe this association to be something of a rarity in this species, and know of no previous record of its occurrence. Chisholm (1965) lists the species of *Gerygone* in which the association has been noted, and *G. fusca* is not among them. The 30-odd cards in the RAOU nest record scheme also carry no report of it.

While the range of the Western Warbler does extend through the interior to central Queensland, it has a generally southern distribution. This is in direct contrast to the other members of *Gerygone* in which this symbiosis has been recorded. They all have northern ranges with the exception of the White-throated Warbler *G. olivacea* which is a migrant. Based on this fact, Hindwood (1955) expounds a theory which may account for its infrequent occurrence in this southern species. He states simply that wasps which are suitable as hosts are relatively rare south of Sydney.

This record, then, may indicate that rather than the association being absent as a behavioural aspect in the southern

members of the genus, it is in fact an ecological impossibility, for when it is possible, the birds do choose to site their nest near that of a wasp.

References

Chisholm, A.H. 1965. Bird Wonders of Australia. 6th Ed. Sydney - Angus & Robertson.

Hindwood, K. A. 1955. Bird/Wasp Nesting Associations. Emu 55(4): 263-274.

16, Badgery Street, Macquarie, A.C.T.

RECENT MEETINGS

July 16

In place of the regular meeting in July, members were invited to attend the "Seminar on the Effects of Forest Fire" held at the Forest Research Institute, Yarralumla. The Seminar was organised by the Canberra Group of the Ecological Society of Australia.

Dr. Peter Fullagar read a paper on the effects of forest fire on mammal and bird populations. He presented evidence to suggest that at least a part of the endemic fauna in the sclerophyll forests of southern Australia is ecologically dependent on regeneration after burning. In some instances there may be a need for controlled burning as a conservation measure - to ensure the presence of suitable habitat.

August 13

Mr. Henry Nix showed some beautiful colour slides during his lecture on "Bird Distribution in relation to Habitat in Central Queensland" at the new Land Research building, Black Mountain. Mr. Nix has been working in the Dawson-Fitzroy catchment area since 1962, and has recorded there more than 350 species of birds. His observations suggest that the region is a major over-wintering area for large numbers of species from south-eastern Australia.

The migrants recorded include Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, White-winged Triller, Reed Warbler, Brown and Rufous Songlarks, White-throated Warbler, Rose Robin, Grey and Rufous Fantails, Golden and Rufous Whistlers and many Honeyeaters.

The brigalow and gidgee scrub here is being cleared at a frightening rate, and Mr. Nix showed slides of open mining at a 70-mile long coal-seam that is gouging out a trench and dumping overburden to widths of up to a mile in places. These radical alterations of the environment are having a disastrous impact on the fauna - particularly the marsupials - but some birds at least appear to be benefitting from it.

The Australian Bustard has returned to the basaltic clay plains wherever sheep-grazing has given way to grain cultivation, and flocks of up to 20 birds can be seen in the sorghum crops. They do not feed on the sorghum itself but on insects etc., within the crop, and are largely left unmolested. Tree-felling has reduced the volume of water lost through transpiration, so that it lies in boggy patches after rain, attracting ducks and snipe. Even ploughed fields lying fallow have acquired an avifauna - in the shape of Ground Cuckoo Shrikes and Banded Plover.

COMING MEETINGSSeptember 10

Betty Temple-Watts will give a talk on the techniques of illustrating, with examples from her book "Birds of the High Country" (in press).

October 8

Murray Elliott and Richard Clough, officers of the Department of the Interior and NCDC respectively, will speak on the proposed development of the East Basin of Lake Burley Griffin and the Molonglo River Flats. This promises to be a most interesting meeting. Some relevant information can be found in CBN No. 4, pages 7-8.

November 12

'Factors controlling Breeding in Ducks' by Wayne Braithwaite.

NOTE: All the above meetings will be held at the CSIRO Lecture Theatre, Black Mountain, commencing at 8 p.m. Tea and biscuits will be available afterwards.

There will be no meetings held in December and January. Next year's programme of activities will be duly advertised in Canberra Bird Notes.

Reminder

Subscribers who have not yet done so are urged to renew their subscription. Let's face it - one dollar a year is peanuts, really'

BOOK REVIEW"WILDLIFE IN THE A.C.T."A Department of the Interior Publication75 cents

This is a handy little book which packs a wealth of information into less than fifty pages. Conservation is the theme that runs through the text. Introductory chapters deal with conservation in the A.C.T. and the influence of Canberra and its growth on wildlife, while a third summarises the topography, climate, vegetation and wildlife habitats in the Territory.

Native mammal groups, such as 'egg-laying mammals', 'possums and gliders' etc. are introduced in a few paragraphs, followed by more detailed information about each species. The birds are similarly treated, except that the greater number of species involved has made for sketchier descriptions, and the passerine species are listed only, with abbreviated indications of habitat, status and abundance.

Reptiles, fish and amphibians are not mentioned at all. Are not these wildlife? Even annotated lists of the commoner species would have been better than nothing.

The book has 48 pages, 14 colour plates, 30 black-and-white photographs and three maps. The text and illustrations are quite attractively produced. The maps are inadequate, however, as at least two shades of hatching in both the relief and_ vegetation maps look identical.

There are also some unfortunate errors in the photograph captions. Thus, what is described as a "Young Freckled Duck" on page 29 is in reality a female Musk Duck; the "Powerful Owl" on page 33 is very obviously a Barn Owl; and a Pink Robin on page 47 is described as a "Flame Robin".

These considerations aside, the book is a bargain at the price. I would recommend it especially to visiting tourists and to those ornithologists desirous of learning more about the mammals they might encounter in the bush.

AHD.

SHORT OBSERVATIONS

Plumed Egret - One at Kelly's Swamp, Fyshwick, July 27 and September 12; one at Jerrabomberra Creek, July 27 and August 12. (M. Clayton)

Shoveler - A male at Jerrabomberra Creek, August 12. (M.C.)

Black-shouldered Kite - A pair nested and raised two young in the top of a pine at Duntroon. The young left the nest about July 20, and were seen at the sewage ponds, accompanied by one parent, on August 13.

Wedge-tailed Eagle - Two soaring above Gungahlin, July 10; another pair near Sutton, August 21. (AD)

Peregrine Falcon - One attacked Galahs over Gungahlin, July 17 and 18. It managed to bind onto one, but dropped it when harried by a Magpie. The Galah flew on, rather lopsidedly. (AD)

Wonga Pigeon - Six at New Chums Road, June 16 (B. Baker);
single birds at Lee's Creek and New Chums Roads, August 13.
(MC)

Superb Lyrebird - Many heard at Lee's Creek and New Chums Road,
June 16 and August 13. (BB, MC)

Little Grassbird - One at Jerrabomberra Creek, August 12. (MC)

Pilot Bird - Three at New Chums Road, August 13. (MC)

Crescent Honeyeater - One at New Chums Road, August 13. (MC)

Noisy Friarbird - Two at O'Connor, August 11. (MC)

Grey Currawong - One at Belconnen rubbish tip, July 29 (MC);
one at New Chums Road, June 16 (BB).

Grey Butcherbird - One at New Chums Road, June 16. (BB)

R.A.O.U. NEWS

Congress and Field Outing, 1969

The 1969 Congress will be held at the Queen Victoria Museum
Launceston, Tasmania, from Friday, October 24 to Monday,
October 27 inclusive. This will be preceded by a Civic
Reception for delegates at the Town Hall on Thursday October
23. The Congress will be followed by a Field Outing which will
be based at 'The Grange', Campbelltown, from October 28 to
November 4.

The programme, application forms and further details are
given in Vol. 69, Part 1 of The Emu, and members are asked to
make early bookings.

BANDING NOTES

The following snippets of information Capital Territory were culled from the bird banding officer CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, (thanks to Dave Purchase).

Silver Gull - 081-65314. Banded as a chick on Lake Hawdon S.A. on 4/10/68 by Robert Carrick. Sighted at Central Basin, Lake Burley Griffin on 12/2/69 by Wim Vestjens. Distance and direction - 525 miles ENE.

Blackbird - 060-60403. Banded as a juvenile at the Botanic Gardens, A.C.T. on 1/1/68, by Steve Wilson. Shot at Castlemaine, Vic., on 28/9/68. Distance and direction - 310 miles WSW. This record is of interest as it is the first movement of any magnitude recorded for the Blackbird in Australia. Although 3969 have been banded in Australia to date, of which 68 have been recovered more than a mile away from their banding-place, the previous longest movement was only 13 miles.

David Thomas has recorded seasonal fluctuations in the numbers of blackbirds present at various RAOU Individual Observation Points in south-eastern Australia, and has suggested that this species may be a partial migrant in Australia as it is in Britain.

Pink Robin - An adult female was banded by Steve Wilson at New Chums Road, A.C.T. on 2/8/69. This species has now been mist-netted in this area for the ninth consecutive year.

Yellow-faced Honey eater - 020-93796. Banded as an adult at Grafton, N.S.W., on 31/7/65 by P.D. Strong. Retrapped at Point Hut Crossing, A.C.T. on 3/5/69 by Steve Wilson. Distance and direction - 465 miles SSW.

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