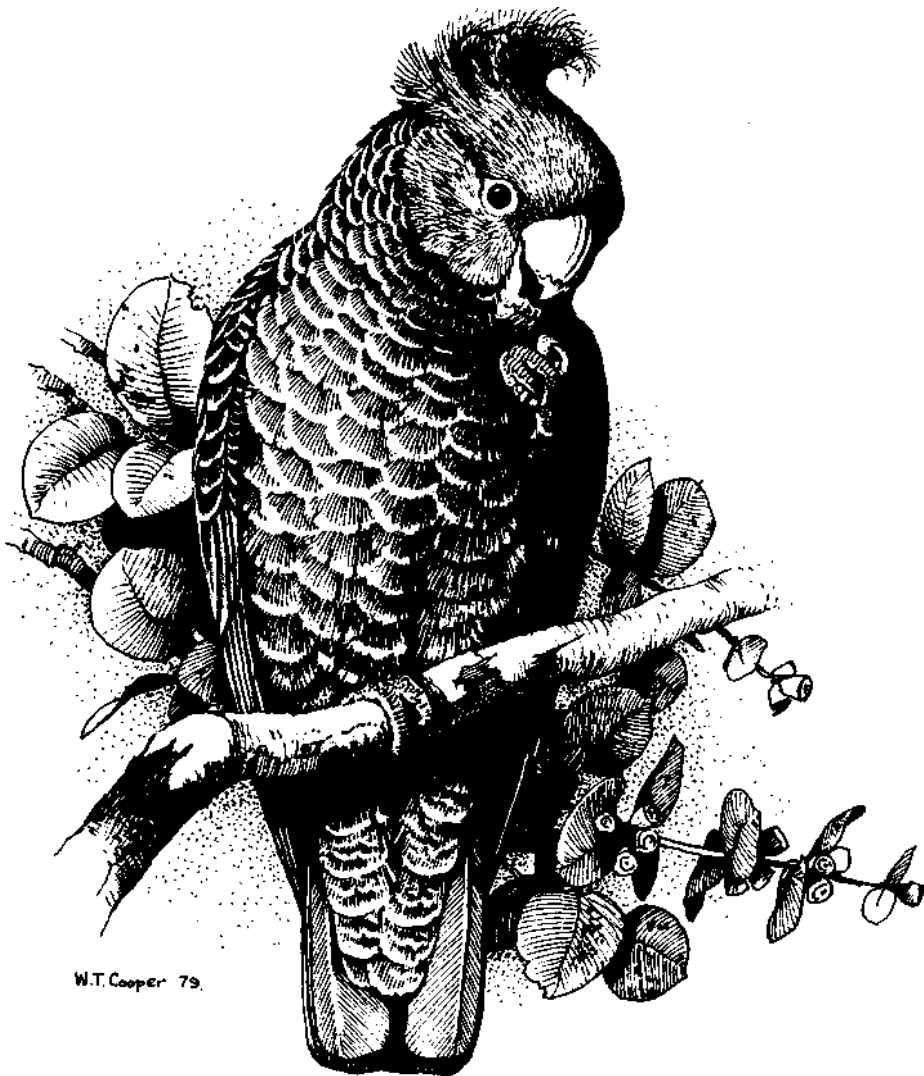


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Rarities Panel

Bryan FitzGerald (Secretary - Ph 485140), Barry Baker, Graeme Chapman, Grahame Clark, Mark Clayton, Neil Hermes, Jack Holland, Richard Schodde. Annual Subscriptions for 1989 are: Student (under 18 years of age) \$7.50; Single \$15.00; Family \$18.00; Institutions \$18.00. All receive one copy of Canberra Bird Notes.

FROM THE EDITORS

Is there life after the ACT Bird Atlas? The answer to this is yes. There are several important COG projects that still require the involvement of members. These include the Lake Tuggeranong Survey, the Waterbird Survey, and the Garden Birds Survey. Members of COG are also contributing to the Australian Bird Count conducted by the RAOU. If you would like to be involved in any of these projects, please contact a member of the COG Committee.

The COG Committee has set up a Projects Sub-committee to provide direction for future projects. This sub-committee has developed a scheme to enable members to record observations from anywhere in COG's Area of Concern in a way that will be compatible with the Atlas. The aim is to enable all observations to be collected systematically into the one database. Full details will be available at the March meeting. The Projects Sub-committee will also provide members with assistance or advice on projects (please contact Hugh Possingham, 19 Burdekin Street, Duffy (tel. 88 4798(H) or 49 5588(W)) - Hugh is the chairman of the Projects Sub-committee).

There is ample opportunity for members to undertake their own projects. These need not be complicated or time-consuming. Many of the best ornithological studies have been simple both in concept and execution. In most cases all that is required is: 1) a simple question; and 2) a notebook and pencil to record observations from which the answers may be obtained. Questions that need answers are raised in this issue of *Canberra Bird Notes* by the paper on cuckoos in a mixed feeding flock by Hugh Possingham. Similar questions are raised by the paper on mixed species flocking by Bert Klein referred to by G. Tibicen in the June issue. The questions include: In what months do birds form mixed species flocks in Canberra? What species form these flocks? Do all birds in these flocks eat the same food? There are thousands of questions waiting to be answered, many could be the bases on which to develop projects. The pursuit of one or two simple projects is well worth doing and adds a touch of spice to your bird-watching.

When you have completed your projects we would like to publish the results in *Canberra Bird Notes*.

Finally, we would like to remind members that if they utilise information that is derived from the Annual Bird Report, this should be acknowledged.

David Purchase and Grahame Clark

THE STORY BEHIND THE DESCRIPTION IN CANBERRA BIRD NOTES OF NEW SUBSPECIES OF BIRDS

Richard Schodde

Members of COG may have been surprised at my describing new subspecies of Australian birds in *Canberra Bird Notes* (13:119-122). Indeed, it has been castigated by Ian McAllan and Murray Bruce in their privately produced and unrefereed booklet *The Birds of New South Wales, A Working List* (1988, Biocon Research Group: Sydney). Herein lies the explanation, for in their "list", McAllan and Bruce had also published four of the subspecies as new, only to fail in their bid for priority.

The facts, in summary, are these. The subspecies in dispute had all arisen out of my own specimen and bibliographic research over the past decade for the combined Zoological Catalogue - RAOU Checklist of the birds of Australia. I had held back publication of the subspecies until all taxonomic revision was completed, in 1988, so that they could be issued together.

In the interim, however, I had diagnosed them, without formally naming them, in the second edition of the *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* (1986, Reader's Digest Services: Sydney). This and conversations I had had with McAllan at the Australian Museum were the initial or main source for McAllan and Bruce's data. Their "list" is not based on original research on series of specimens, but on the gleaning of published and private information from others.

That McAllan and Bruce knew of my intention to name these subspecies myself is clear; it was widely known in taxonomic circles in Australian ornithology. Contrary to their account, I had heard by February 1988 that Bruce was intending to describe one of them - the Australian Sarus Crane. I wrote to him then, asking him to respect my prior work but received no reply. Again contrary to their account, I was not prompted to "race to print" by McAllan's visit to Canberra last January but by information from Denis Saunders and Leo Joseph on 13 February 1989. They warned me that McAllan and Bruce were "scooping" the south-east race of the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo as well, a subspecies that I alone had worked out, as noted by Parker (1982, *S. Aust. Ornith.* 28:209-210) and contrary to misleading and incorrect references quoted by McAllan and Bruce.

Fortunately, the December 1988 issue of *Canberra Bird Notes* was behind schedule and, through special assistance from editor Philip Veerman, available to take the extra four pages for my descriptions. They were incorporated within a week without effect on other articles planned for that issue and CSIRO covered all typing and printing costs. Being issued on 28 February 1989 allowed McAllan and Bruce to criticize its printed date of

publication which was shown as December 1988. McAllan and Bruce's own "list" is also dated 1988 but did not appear until late May 1989!

So, rather than pre-empt them, I had forestalled them from pre-empting me. Their attempt to claim nomenclatural credit for research that was not their own, in breach of the Code of Ethics (Appendix A) of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature, had been frustrated by my prior publication.

It only remains here to rectify procedural flaws in their accounts of the new subspecies.

Platycercus eximius aureodorsalis McAllan and Bruce (= *P.e. elecica* Schodde and Short) - Golden-mantled Eastern Rosella. McAllan and Bruce rejected Mathews' earlier name *cecilae* for this form because its type locality was from north of its range and hybrid zone with the Pale-headed Rosella. In proper taxonomic practice, however, the identity of nominal taxa is determined by type specimen, not locality. The two syntypes of *cecilae* are figured on plate 28 in vol. 5 of Gould's 1848 *The Birds of Australia*. One is a typical Golden-mantled Eastern Rosella but for its slightly smaller red breast, tacit evidence that its given locality is not definitive. The specimen is mislaid or lost (Stone 1913, *Austral Avian Rec.* 1:149). Thought by Gould and Stone loc. cit. to be immature, the other specimen, ANSP 22872, has the black "shoulders" of adulthood and a yellow head blotched with red; it is thus a hybrid between "Pale-headed" and "Eastern" rosellas and taxonomically unidentifiable. To settle the application of Mathews' name *cecilae*, therefore, I chose ANSP 22872 as its lectotype, an action that I inadvertently omitted from the protologue of *P.e. elecica*.

Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne McAllan and Bruce (= *C.b. graptogyne* Schodde, Saunders and Homberger) - south-east Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. McAllan and Bruce published this subspecies without designating a type specimen, a serious breach of taxonomic procedure when specimens are available. Accordingly, all specimen material alluded to in their description, including the holotype of *C.b. graptogyne* Schodde, Saunders and Homberger, is automatically syntypic. To sew up *C.b. graptogyne* McAllan and Bruce nomenclaturally, I here choose as its lectotype ANWC 36273, which is the holotype of *C.b. graptogyne* Schodde, Saunders and Homberger; McAllan and Bruce's name now becomes both a junior primary homonym and junior objective synonym of *C.b. graptogyne* Schodde, Saunders and Homberger.

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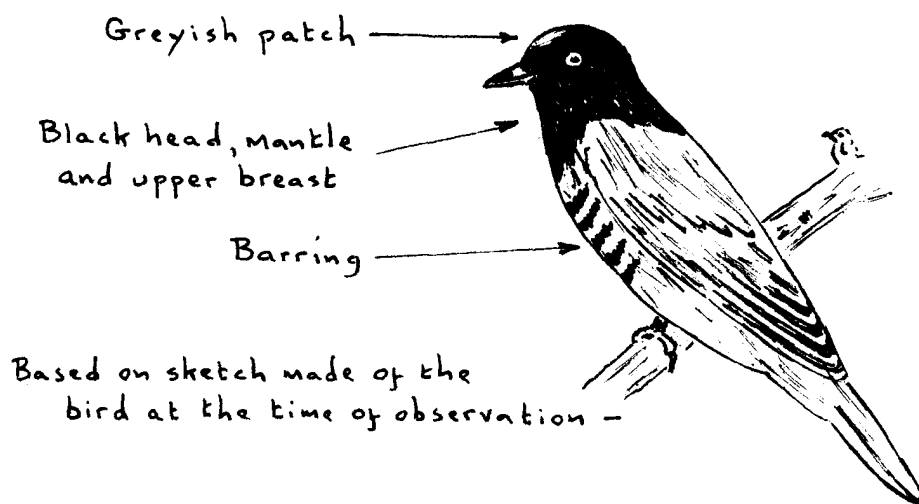
A DARK-PHASE WHITE-BELLIED CUCKOO-SHRIKE IN MELBA AND SOME NOTES FROM THE LITERATURE ON THE SPECIES

David Purchase and Shirley Purchase

We keep a daily record of the birds seen in the vicinity of our home in Melba and in recent years Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina novaehollandiae* have become relatively uncommon. During 1979 to 1982 they were recorded on an average of 131 days each year, whereas during the past two years they were recorded on an average of only 29 days each year. Therefore, on 9 April 1989, when a group of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes was heard calling in the area, an effort was made to locate and view them.

The group, consisting of two adults and three immatures, was moving and feeding among eucalypts growing in our garden and the surrounding area. Associated with them, but remaining slightly apart, was a slightly smaller and darker bird. The weather was, sunny and we viewed the birds from 1515hrs until they moved out of sight at 1530hrs. The observations were made with binoculars (7x35) and the naked eye at distances from about 8 to 50m.

The following notes were made at the time of the darker bird (see also sketch): all of the head (except for the greyish patch on top), upper breast, and mantle were black; the breast below the black area was strongly barred; the abdomen was white to pale grey; the primaries and secondaries appeared to be darker, with more pronounced white edging, than those of the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes; it was slightly smaller than an immature Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike which perched nearby. The call was not heard. On the basis of



these features we identified the bird as a dark-phase (melanistic) White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *C. papuensis*. This has since been endorsed by the Rarities Panel.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes are uncommon visitors to the Canberra region. During the 14 years from 1 July 1974 to 30 June 1988 that Annual Bird Reports have been continuously published (*Canberra Bird Notes* Volumes '3 to 14), they were reported on 12 occasions. Since 1 July 1988, three more have been listed by the Rarities Panel in Endorsed Lists No 22 (*Canberra Bird Notes* 14(1)) and No 23 (*Canberra Bird Notes* 14(2)). Of the total of 15 birds, eight were reported as being dark-phase.

It is difficult to distinguish between non-melanistic White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes and immature Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, except by call (Marchant 1989). It is possible, therefore, that some sightings of non-melanistic White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes are being overlooked in the ACT (Anon. 1989).

We have examined the Bird Reports submitted to the Rarities Panel for five of the latest sightings. All were dark-phase birds, one of which was noted as having an all-black head. Each of the other four birds were described as having a grey patch on the crown of an otherwise black head. The observers drew particular attention to this grey patch.

The only recently published book on bird identification we have been able to locate that indicates dark-phase birds may have a grey patch on their crowns is by Pizzey and Doyle (1980). The illustration in their book shows a bird with a grey crown and in the text it states "The amount of black varies; some have all-black heads".

There is, however, a good description of dark-phase White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes, including the patch on the crown, in a paper by Galbraith (1969). In this paper he includes a discussion on melanism in the species and comments "When the throat, upper breast and ear-coverts are highly melanic, the hind-neck and the remainder of the head, **except the centre of the crown** (my emphasis), may be more or less black ...". He also describes the distribution of melanism in relation to age and sex: "Males are characterised by rather high concentrations on the throat, breast and ear-coverts, by the rarity of barring on the belly and breast, and by rather even distributions on the upperside of the head. Females show rather low concentrations on and around the throat, a greater tendency towards barring of the belly and breast, lower concentrations on the crown and higher around it, lower concentrations on the thighs and higher on the flanks. First-year birds resemble females, but have still lower concentrations on and around the throat, and distinctly larger ones on the hind-neck and flanks."

The description by Galbraith suggests that the bird which we saw was probably a first-year bird or a female.

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CUCKOOS IN A MIXED FEEDING FLOCK

Hugh Possingham

Flocks of several species of bird feeding together have been documented in many continents under a variety of circumstances. Some species form relatively stable mixed feeding flocks (Bell 1980, Grubb 1973) while others join together opportunistically to exploit a superabundant food source. Here I report the composition and other characteristics of a large mixed flock feeding on grubs in an open woodland dominated by Blakely's Red Gum *Eucalyptus blakelyi* in O'Malley, ACT, on 26 February 1989.

After walking through the woodland for several minutes without hearing or seeing any birds I came across a large, quiet flock of birds feeding on pale green grubs, 1cm to 3cm in length, in the foliage of a stand of a dozen Blakely's Red Gum. The grubs were probably the larvae of Cup Moths *Doratifera* sp. The most conspicuous members of the flock were 10-12 Dusky Woodswallows *Artamus cyanopterus*, and 5-7 Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes *Coracina novaehollandiae*. Other species observed feeding on the grubs in twenty minutes of observation were: 3 Fan-tailed Cuckoos *Cuculus pyrrhophanus*, 2 Shining Bronze-Cuckoos *Chrysococcyx lucidus*, 1 Black-eared Cuckoo *C. osculans*, 2 Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos *C. basalis*, 5 White-winged Trillers *Lalage sueurii*, 2 Scarlet Robins *Petroica multicolor*, 3 Rufous Whistlers *Pachycephala rufiventris*, 1 Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*, and 2 Leaden Flycatchers *Myiagra rubecula*. Two Varied Sitellas *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*, one White-throated Treecreeper *Climacteris leucophaea*, several Brown-headed Honeyeaters *Melithreptus brevirostris*, and many individuals of Striated Pardalotes *Pardalotus striatus* and Spotted Pardalotes *P. punctatus* may also have been exploiting the same food source.

Several other species, probably not feeding on the grubs, were also present in this large diverse flock.

The size and diversity of the flock is itself unusual. The remarkable presence of so many cuckoo species and individuals in a mixed species flock may be attributed to the comparative absence of interspecific aggression. The Black-eared Cuckoo was briefly harassed by two Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*, while the Brown-headed Honeyeaters chased the bronze-cuckoos on more than one occasion. This lack of aggression may be because breeding had finished for most species (Bell 1986).

Theories that explain flocking in birds fall into two categories: those that assume flocking reduces the chance of predation; and those that assume individuals in a flock gain some foraging advantage e.g. individuals in a flock have a higher rate of net energy gain (Pulliam 1973, Clark and Mangel 1986). It is possible that the flock reported in this paper may be explained by the latter theory. There is no reason, however, to suspect that it was any more than an opportunistic aggregation of individuals exploiting a superabundant food source, as opposed to a flock of relatively fixed composition. It is interesting to note that McCulloch (1966) observed a less diverse mixed species flock feeding on "soldier" caterpillars at Wyperfield. The flock included Pallid Cuckoos *C. pallidus* and several Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes. Bell (1986) documents a number of small mixed-species flocks that included cuckoos.

The ability of so many individuals and species to aggregate and feed on defoliating insects has implications for the management of dieback in eucalypts. I urge observers to gather as much information as possible regarding bird predation on insects which may cause dieback (Landsberg *et al.* in press).

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HOW TO IDENTIFY BROWN AND STUBBLE QUAILS IN THE FIELD

Jack Holland

Brown Quail *Coturnix australis* and Stubble Quail *C. novaezelandiae* can be difficult to find and difficult to identify. As many readers of *Canberra Bird Notes* will be aware, this is because they live in grassland and are often seen only after they have been flushed by accident. All that is available to make the identification is a blurred impression of a plump, brownish bird, exploding with whirring wings, often right beneath your feet. By the time you have recovered your composure the bird has dived back into the grass and cannot be located again.

However, with care, and particularly if you are actually looking for the birds rather than encountering them by chance, the two species can be separated. The main diagnostic features are given in the following table:

	Stubble Quail	Brown Quail
BACK	Boldly streaked with white	Finely streaked with white
HEAD	Clear white lines down centre of head above and below eyes.	Faint white lines centre of head, above and below eyes.
THROAT	Male - rich buff Female - pale	Light brown
BELOW	Chest - longitudinal black streaks, White belly (Female duller)	Fine, transverse black barring (chevrons)
CALL	Three note whistle	Two note drawn-out whistle

The Stubble Quail is much more boldly streaked on the back and around the head, and is lighter below than the Brown Quail which often gives the appearance of being a uniform dark brown bird. Even this may be difficult to distinguish on only a fleeting glance and may not be reliable. Nor in my opinion is the habitat, and how close you can get to the bird before it flushes, or how far it flies before it dives to the ground.

The best diagnostic feature for these species is their call which is also described in the table. For a better description the reader should consult Graham Pizzey's *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* (1980, Collins: Sydney) or preferably obtain a copy of cassette 2 (Rufous Night Heron to Chestnut Rail) of *A Field Guide to Australian Bird Song* (Bird Observers Club of Australia: Melbourne) which contains clear, side by side, examples of the calls. The main problem in Canberra from my experience is that the birds seem to call only infrequently (confined to the breeding season?). The species are relatively common in grassland areas of the ACT such as the Tuggeranong Valley, where I've often encountered them during my surveys but have seldom heard them call. Whether this is a local phenomenon or for some reason calls from the grass are easier to overlook than from trees is unclear to me.

Jack Holland, 8 Chauvel Circle, CHAPMAN ACT 2601

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF BIRDS OF THE CANBERRA REGION - PART IV

Brendan J. Lepschi

Introduction

This bibliography supplements parts one, two and three (Prendergast 1984, 1987, Lepschi 1988). The methods and abbreviations used are the same as those in the previous three parts. For this update, unpublished theses by students from the Australian National University Department Zoology have also been included.

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THE NAMING OF TURKEY HILL AT TIDBINBILLA NATURE RESERVE

Eddie Green

The small hill just behind the visitors centre in Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve is known as Turkey Hill. Some people have deduced from this naming of the hill that Australian Brush-turkeys *Alectura lathami* were once found in this locality. The truth is somewhat more down-to-earth.

My grandmother, Mary Anne Green, lived in the Tidbinbilla Valley from 1885. The original homestead was at Ashbrook, which is where the bird feeding area is now located. In 1895 the family moved the short distance to Rock Valley where I was brought up. This homestead still exists at the work area in the nature reserve.

Whilst at Ashbrook (some time between 1890 and 1895) my grandmother owned a flock of Domestic Turkeys *Meleagris gallopavo*. One day all the turkeys went missing. Just over a week later they were found roosting in the bushes on the hill now called Turkey Hill. This story was well known in the Green family when I was young and I'm sure it is the true reason for the hill's name. It is also described in an account of the Green family in the Tidbinbilla area (Monica Flint (1983), "To Green the Memory", Tidbinbilla Pioneers Association: Canberra).

One other hill in the area with a bird name is the hill called Smith's Hill which is located above Paddys River Homestead. This was sometimes called Blue Jay Hill when I was young, blue jay being the name we used for the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina noveahollandiae*.

E. Green, PO Box 151, CANOWINDRA NSW 2804

ODD OBS

WILLIE WAGTAIL ROBS SPIDER-WEBS

Brendan J. Lepschi

On 8 August 1989, a single adult Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* was observed stealing captured insects from spider-webs on a building at CSIRO Gungahlin. The bird would fly up from a window-sill or similar fixture, hover briefly and snatch an insect (occasionally remaining airborne and attempting successive "gleanings"), and then return to its perch.

Web-robbing has, to my knowledge, been reported in the Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta* (*Canberra Bird Notes* 9:146), Crested Shrike-tit *Falcunulus frontatus* (*Bird Observers Club Monthly Notes*, August 1948:1) and Grey Fantail *R. fuliginosa* (*Canberra Bird Notes* 13:45), and may well be more widespread amongst other small, insectivorous passerines.

Brendan J. Lepschi, 24 Fullwood Street, WESTON ACT 2611

WHERE TO WATCH BIRDS: NO 9 - SOME NOTES ON THE NORTH EAST COAST OF THE USA

Martin A. Butterfield

In September and October 1989 I had the opportunity to spend five weeks in north-eastern USA and Quebec, Canada. As this is not an unusual area for Australians to visit I am describing some of my experiences as a help to others going there.

Preparation

An obvious first tip is to try and contact a local birder to find out the good spots. A further source of advice appears to be local shops specialising in service to birders. A friendly example was the Audubon shop (not run by the Society) in Madison, Connecticut.

Timing

A particularly important point about birding in North America is the influence of the weather. All birdlists make a point of specifying the four seasons: in winter there is hardly a bird seen in much of this area, so don't go then and expect to see a great deal; summer should be OK, but many passage migrants will be further north. Even in spring or autumn precise timing is needed to get optimal birding (for example, the Snow Geese *Anser caerulescens* are only at Cap Tourmente, Québec for a short in autumn and pass through Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, New York, only in spring). An advantage of spring is that the warblers are in breeding plumage: if you think thornbills are difficult to separate, try about 40 species of non-breeding warblers!

Locations

Starting at the beginning, there is very good birding available via public transport in New York City.

The most obvious location is Central Park (although it is regarded as insane to go into some areas alone, particularly with expensive items, such as binoculars, visible). It is very easy to get to the park by walking from mid- or up-town Manhattan, or by bus, taxi or subway from elsewhere. Before going to the park check whether the American Museum of Natural History has an extension course going there. This costs \$5, but gives an expert guide (and an armed police escort!). Very good value and an easy way to learn the birds and meet a few local contacts. The highlight of my trips there was seeing a Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* swallowing a very large rat.

The area off the end of the runway at Kennedy International is Jamaica Bay National Wildlife Refuge. It is way out from Manhattan but you can take the subway to Broad Channel station and then walk back a couple of kilometres. This is basically a reclamation project with a wide variety of habitats created for birds of all sorts. On my visit I saw about 40 species plus a heap of waders I couldn't identify. The staff were very friendly and helpful.

About 250km from the Big Apple, in Delaware, is the Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge. The nearest accommodation is in Dover and is motel only (but quite cheap). Highlights here are Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* and Snow Geese in winter and waders in late summer and early autumn. Herons abound.

Just south of Bombay Hook is Cape Henlopen, a Delaware State Park with a sand spit jutting into Delaware Bay. (We always went for public sector parks where available: they were cheaper and generally better set out.) There were many seabirds, and as it is opposite Cape May (a vehicular ferry goes between the two) it should also be a good spot for migrating raptors in autumn. There was a nice camping ground just south of the spit.

Although not much birding was done near Washington, there were a number of passerines in and near the camping ground at Greenbelt park. This was about 16km from the Capitol, but with public transport access to downtown if required. While in Washington, if you feel like a laugh (or a challenge) try to work out where the Smithsonian Institution got the names for its display of Australian birds.

While in Quebec, Canada, we read that Snow Geese were back at Cap Tourmente Refuge. What an understatement! There were 70 000 geese and countless ducks. All were being looked at by several hundred birders (at \$5 a car, the Societe Linnee du Quebec must have made a heap!) On the way out to the Cape, Ile d'Orleans offered lots of land birds and a distant view of a line of surf (which turned out to be the geese). An initially disturbing note was the sight of hundreds of decoys in the fields surrounding the Refuge and signs inviting hunters to share the blinds (hides). Some of the decoys consisted of white plastic shopping bags tied to white stakes. All of this seemed like

cheating, but I was subsequently told there were so many geese in the Refuge that the hunting did a good job of culling.

The final National Wildlife Refuge was found by chance, just west of Syracuse when we were driving to Niagara Falls. This was Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. Although we could spend only a short time there the range of ducks and geese, and the hordes of Red-winged Blackbirds *Aegilus phoeniceus* in the reeds were tremendous. There is a 10km drive-through track. (This is a good idea, as the car forms a mobile hide and gives very good views.)

Equipment and where to get it

The best prices for binoculars were at 47th Street Photo (on 47th Street west of 5th Avenue) although dealing with the Hasidic sales agents here takes some experience and patience and it is essential to know what you want before going there. Bargaining is a waste of time here, but well worth trying in the Italian-run camera/electrical stores on 5th Avenue.

We bought our tent (by mail order before we left Australia) from L.L. Bean in Freeport Maine. They are open 24 hours a day, and have an unconditional exchange/refund policy. The latter was adhered to, but it may have given us more confidence if it hadn't been necessary!

Martin A. Butterfield, 4/18 Jaeger Circuit, BRUCE ACT 2617

REVIEW

Bird Watching a monthly magazine for bird watchers. Publisher's address: PO Box 500, Leicester, LE99 0AA, United Kingdom. £24.50 for 12 issues (includes overseas surface mail).

"Crowds flock for 'golden wonder'" was the headline. "The police estimate for the Saturday crowd was 3 000 ...". No, not a new sporting hero, but a report in the April 1989 issue of *Bird Watching* on the appearance in a Kent supermarket carpark of a Golden-winged Warbler. I have little interest in Golden-winged Warblers (or any other birds in British carparks), but found fascinating the articles describing the rare occurrence of this bird in the UK and the not-so-rare responses of the thousands of UK twitchers to it.

According to the publishers, the monthly *Bird Watching* magazine has 303 000 readers. (One per cent of them saw the warbler that Saturday!) It is in large A4-size format, full of wonderful colour photographs and illustrations and about 80 pages in length. Clearly aimed at a wide variety of audiences,

Bird Watching contains regular articles for newcomers to bird observation on how-to-do-it, and excellent articles on bird identification and bird behaviour. While its focus is naturally on the birds most likely to be seen in the UK, each issue I have seen includes articles on birds found elsewhere in the world.

The magazine contains many advertisements - in both display and classified formats - that are, I suspect, welcomed by readers as they focus on binoculars, telescopes, outdoor wear and birding holiday destinations in the UK and overseas. Each issue also contains a detailed diary of interesting observations and hints on what-to-see-where this month.

Published in association with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, *Bird Watching* is able to serve British bird observers in a way that Australians are not being served. But then, an Australian bird monthly could not attract 303 000 readers, could it? *Bird Watching* is recommended for readers planning to travel to Europe or just interested in the birds and bird observers of the UK.

David McDonald

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

SILVER GULLS

27 November 1989

A note to let you know of an unusual experience.

Driving my bus this morning I left the city bus interchange at 9.43. As I was starting to go up Mort Street I noticed two Silver Gulls on the road, one standing and one sitting. I sounded the horn and the Silver Gull that was standing dragged the other off the road by the tail - a distance of about 2 metres.

I was too surprised to look to see if they were a pair, but both appeared to be full grown birds.

The bird sitting was either stunned or injured.

I would be interested to know if this happening was as extraordinary as I think it was.

John McDonald, 28 Mills Street, HACKETT ACT 2602

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

It is becoming very difficult these days to keep *au fait* with the increasing number of studies being carried out on Australian birds. Not only are there many people working on the studies but the results are being published in many different journals - more than most of us can read.

The Australian Bird Study Association is attempting to overcome this problem by publishing in *Corella* a series called "Australian Bird Reviews". This series will "bring together this wealth of information into comprehensive authoritative reviews so that all can become aware of the progress that has been made".

As well as publishing the series in *Corella*, individual copies will be available and it may become possible to subscribe solely to this series. Anybody who wishes to obtain information on subscriptions to this series or obtain copies should write to M.D. Murray, PO Box A313, Sydney South NSW 2000.

The first review in the series has already been published and covers work on Megapodes (the Malleefowl, Australian Brush-turkey, and Orange-footed Scrubfowl are the Australian members of this group).

The recent disclosures about the deliberations of the MCNAB committee (in the last two issues of *Canberra Bird Notes*) have obviously been leaked to other publications. In the November 1989 edition of *The Australian Way* (the Australian Airlines in-flight magazine) there was an amusing article on collective nouns for Australian animals, written by Colin Windsor. Some of his suggestions were:

A Corroboree of Currawongs

A Ken Done of Rosellas

A Sikorsky of Hawks (based on their helicopter-like hovering ability) A

Steptoe of Bowerbirds

A Caucus of Galahs.

This last one is based, *inter alia*, on his belief that "their call is nothing more than a boring, repetitive, almost painful screech." My own collective noun for Galahs was "a pubfull" which on reflection is not incompatible with his suggestion.

Mrs Betty Temple Watts, a Life Member of COG (and one of the foundation members) who illustrated *Birds in the Australian High Country*,

Waterfowl in Australia, and a set of bird stamps, wrote the following letter to me recently:

Dear G. Tibicen,

In *Canberra Bird Notes* March 1989, you ask for further collective names for our birds.

When my sister, Winifred Flower, was staying with me from England in 1974, on hearing Superb Fairy-wrens she called it "a sizzle of Blue Wrens." Ever since when hearing the birds before seeing them I always think of the "sizzle of Blue Wrens".

With best wishes,
Betty Temple Watts.

After reading the letter I went out and listened to several groups of Superb Fairy-wrens and sizzle is an excellent description for the sound they make. If you don't believe me, go and listen!

Next - a "twitching" story. In early September 1989, a Great Knot turned up in the Shetland Isles which is not one of the easiest parts of Great Britain to get to. Hundreds of dedicated twitchers missed out on an opportunity to see the bird as all flights and ferries were fully booked out shortly after news was flashed on "Birdline", the rarities information service. One disappointed twitcher was quoted as saying "its very frustrating that such a crowd-pulling bird should have turned up at a hard-to-get-to-place. If it had appeared on mainland Britain, thousands of people would have been along to see it." The report raises two issues in my mind. First, if they really want to see a Great Knot why don't they go somewhere where they are not a rarity - it's the same bird wherever it is. Second, the use of "Birdline" can be detrimental to the bird's well-being as too many people can turn up too quickly and further distress an already stressed bird. With Annual Bird Reports and Rarities Reports, the time lag in filling out and passing on the forms means there is a lag in the information becoming public by which time the bird has moved on. With a "Birdline", however, the information can be public within 24 hours. Perhaps COG needs to consider a policy towards making rare bird reports public? What do readers think?

And now for the educational part of this column. This time it is about the new word "furgling" which is fully explained in *Australian Natural History* (Spring 1989, 23:100). Furgling is a form of kleptogomy (literally "marriage theft") observed during the breeding season in Superb Fairy-wrens *Malurus cyaneus*

and Splendid Fairy-wrens *M. splendens*. Males go courting in a neighbouring groups territory seizing any opportunity to mate with an unguarded female. They then return to their own group's to raise offspring that are often the products of furling raids by other males.

Ian Rowley and Michael Brooker of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology in Perth have shown amongst Splendid Fairy-wrens that up to 60 per cent of the nestlings in one nest are not fathered by any of the birds co-operatively rearing them. Birds become more like humans the more you study them!

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The most interesting things shown on this list are the return appearances this summer of both the Common Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* and the Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia*. The list shows with these two species the benefits of individual records of uncommon birds being summarised as it allows trends to be identified and questions to be asked.

The koel sightings show that in November there were possibly two around, one in the north (Scullin, Cook) and one in the south (Fisher). It is possible, but unlikely, that it was the same peripatetic bird. All of the koels sighted so far have been males.

The Regent Honeyeater records show that the first record of a single bird was at Gundaroo in early October. Records then occurred in early November leading up to a breeding attempt. The question is how many birds were involved - only two or was it more? Were the Hughes and Campbell Park birds the same?

The 'twitchers' highlight of the list is the Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*. These birds are known for their appearance in locations out of their normal range during migration times.

Other interesting matters were the increasing number of White-bellied Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* (note all these sightings were very close to large bodies of water); the Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* (presumably the Tidbinbilla population are expanding away from the barbecues and hopefully losing their stealing tendencies); and the Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* (from an area where are usually a couple of sightings per year - perhaps there is a small breeding population along the Molonglo River upstream of the outlet of the water treatment works and members should pay some attention to the *area*).

Some COG members have recently expressed concern that records submitted to the Rarities Panel may be used to identify the location of uncommon species so that they can be made into museum specimens. This concern is totally misplaced. All Rarities Panel members have agreed not to use information gathered from Unusual Record Forms to endanger the bird. This means either directly by collecting the bird or indirectly by passing information via a "grapevine" or "network" so that large numbers of birdwatchers turn up to view (and flush and disturb) an unusual bird. The process of "vetting" records takes a least two months before information is made public. In this time the birds have either moved on, settled successfully or completed any nesting or other activity that may stress the bird. Further, the location quoted is quite general and, if the person who submitted the Unusual Record Form wishes, can be left blank.

No birds have been or will be collected or disadvantaged in any way by being reported on an Unusual Record Form.

Endorsed List No 24 follows:

RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO 24

Category 3

Emu

1;25 Jun 89; C. Dow; Woods Res., Colin Dam Road

Whistling Kite

1;24 Jun 89; I. Taylor; Uriarra Road (Grid 21)

1;13 Aug 89; G. Clark; Sturt Island

White-bellied Sea-Eagle

1;23 Apr 89; R. Bell & B. FitzGerald; Acacia Inlet

2;29 Jun 89; M. Clayton; SW end, Lake George

1;4 Aug 89; P. Mahoney; ANU

1;7 Sep 89; N. Luff; Sullivans Creek

1;7 Oct 89; L. Gowing; Googong Dam

Brown Quail

3;24 Jun 89; I. Crawford & I. Baird; Naas R. (Grid 160)

2;22 Oct 89; J. Holland; Lower Stranger Retention Pond,
Tuggeranong

Peaceful Dove

1;23 Oct 88; K. Hahne; Canberra Yacht Club

1;18 Dec 88; H. Hahne; Canberra Yacht Club

Brush Bronzewing

1 male; 24 Mar 89; N. Payne; Corin Dam Road, near ski area

- Common Koel
 1;8 Sep 89; P. Mahoney; ANU
 1;12 Nov 89; J. Bissett; Fisher
 1;13 Nov 89; G. McLachlan; Scullin
 1;17 Nov 89; J. Bissett; Fisher
 1;18 Nov 89; M. Butterfield; Cook
 1;19 Nov 89; J. Bissett; Fisher
- Singing Bushlark
 3;15 Jan 89; I. McMahon; Lake Tuggeranong
 1;22 Oct 89; J. Holland; Point Hut Retention Pond
- Red-capped Robin
 1 male; 6 Oct 89; T. Ross; Molonglo River upstream Water
 Treatment Works outlet
- Regent Honeyeater
 1;7 Oct 89; R. Hosking; Gundaroo
 2;1 Nov 89; B. Anderson; Northbourne Avenue, Braddon
 1;5 Nov 89; B. Anderson; Hughes
 2;5 Nov 89; I. McMahon; Campbell Park
 2 nesting; 10 Nov 89; I. Taylor; Campbell Park
- Spangled Drongo
 1;7 May 89; B. Horrigan; NW Mt Majura peak (Grid 17)
- Category 2
 Superb Parrot
 4;24 Oct 89; H. Possingham; Murrumbateman v
- Possible Escapees
 Diamond Dove
 1;10 Oct 88; B. Pennefather; Uriarra Crossing
- Rainbow Lorikeet
 2; Sep 88; I. Taylor, Ainslie (Grid 26)
 1;14 Jun 89; I. McMahon; Lyneham
- Escapees
 Little Corella
 1;27 Jul 89; M. Clayton; Gungahlin
- Budgerigar
 1;12 Mar 89; I. McMahon; Lake Ginninderra
- Zebra Finch
 1;4 Dec 88; I. McMahon; Lyneham

FOR SALE

The following are available from Canberra Ornithologists Group, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608:

A POCKET LIST OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS Price 50c

This booklet lists the names of all bird species recorded in Australia. Alongside the names are ten columns that can be used to tally the species seen in different localities or on different days. It greatly simplifies the recording of field lists.

A FIELD LIST OF THE BIRDS OF CANBERRA AND DISTRICT Price \$3

This booklet lists the bird species found in the Canberra region with indications of the frequency of occurrence, time of breeding, preferred habitat, localities where they may be found, and nest details. It is designed to provide supplementary local detail to larger publications which need to be consulted for identification.

BIRD SONGS OF CANBERRA Price \$10

This cassette contains recordings of the songs and calls of 73 birds that are commonly heard in Canberra gardens and parks. The majority have been recorded in Canberra or the surrounding area. Seasonal variation in songs have been included where appropriate.

GARDEN BIRD SURVEY CHART Price 50c

This is the means of contributing to our Garden Bird Survey and keeping track of what happens in your area.

ACT BIRDPWATCHERS HOTLINE Telephone 475530

An up-to-date five minute recorded message with interesting news such as returning migrants, rarities, meetings, outings, and bargains for birdwatchers in Canberra. Twenty-four hour service up-dated every Sunday.

Canberra Bird Notes is published quarterly by the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Contributions are welcome. These should fit into one of the following categories: major articles (up to about 3000 words); short notes and "Odd Obs" (up to about 300 words); reviews of books and articles (up to about 500 words); and where to watch birds (up to about 800 words). The articles and notes should cover matters of the distribution, identification, and behaviour of birds in the Canberra region (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay, and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 582252).

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