

# CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

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## CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.

P.O. Box 301, Civic Square, ACT 2608

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The following people represent Canberra Ornithologists Group in various ways although they may not be formally on the Committee:

<i>ADP Support</i>	Cedric Bear	--	258 3169
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<i>Conservation Council Representatives</i>	Jo Vandermark	--	248 5140
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#### *Conservation Subcommittee:*

Jo Vandermark (Convener - Ph. 247 7963), Bruce Lindenmayer, David Pfanner, Michael Rowe, John Webster.

#### *Fund Raising and Membership Subcommittee:*

Bruce Lindenmayer (Convener 7 Ph. 297 4783), Jenny Bounds, Noel Luff, Jo Vandermark, Sue Webb

(Continued inside back cover)

A VISIT TO THE SILVER GULL BREEDING COLONY AT LAKE  
BATHURST, NSW, IN SEPTEMBER 1990

*Chris Davey*

The Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* is a common sight around the lakes, town centres and garbage tips of Canberra. Young birds are usually first seen in the area towards the beginning of November each year. By around January the majority of birds seen are in adult plumage.

Within south-eastern New South Wales there are at present only a few areas where Silver Gulls breed. All are on islands off the coast such as Five Islands off Port Kembla and Montagu Island off Narooma, or on islands in lakes such as Lake Bathurst and Lake Jindabyne.

Jerry van Tets noted that there was a large breeding colony at Lake Bathurst and that the main breeding season was from August to November (*Birds of the Australian High Country* ed. H.J. Frith (1969) Reed: Sydney). He also noted the possibility of a breeding colony starting on islands in Lake Burley Griffin. This has never happened (J. van Tets pers. corn.).

The first Silver Gulls to be banded at Lake Bathurst were in early November 1961. At this time 325 chicks were marked by Bill Belton and Steve Wilson. Other bandings followed: in 1962, five adults and 134 chicks were marked by Warren Hitchcock and John McKean; in 1963, 209 chicks were marked by Warren Hitchcock; in 1964, 1499 chicks were marked from five islands named Snake Islet, Wattle Islet, Big Rocky Islet, Big Flat Island and Little Flat Islet by Robert Carrick; and in 1965, 200 adults and 500 chicks were marked by Robert Carrick (D. Purchase pers. corn.). Although these figures do not give any absolute number of nests they do give some indication of minimum numbers. There has been no further banding since 1965. Of the 2872 gulls marked only 82 (2.9%) have been recovered away from the lake of which only six were recovered in Canberra (see Table 1).

Band number	Date banded	Date recovered	Place recovered
081-21135	17.11.64	21. 8.66	CSIRO, Acton (Broken wing)
081-50397	15.11.65	1. 1.69	Lake Burley Griffin (Sighted)
081-50430	15.11.65	3. 5.75	Pialligo (Dead)
081-50527	2.12.65	23. 2.66	Orana Bay (Dead)
081-50657	16.12.65	17. 2.66	Ainslie (Clipped wings)
081-50676	16.12.65	20. 9.70	Lake Burley Griffin (Sighted)

**Table 1.** Recoveries in the ACT of Silver Gulls banded as nestlings at Lake Bathurst (from data provided by the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes).

Regular waterbird surveys at Lake Bathurst count birds observed from the shore. Although the breeding colony has been known for many years no counts have been made on the islands. The number of islands on which gulls can breed varies with the water level of the lake. Many islands join up to the shore when the water is low. This allows access to them by foxes, cattle and sheep.

As part of a three year project to examine the problem of Silver Gulls on garbage tips in the Sydney area, the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service has banded many gulls at Five Islands and at Montagu Island. To see if any of the banded birds were breeding at Lake Bathurst Phil Straw (NSWPWS) with Mark Clayton, Peter Fullagar and Chris Davey (COG members) paid a visit to the breeding colony on 24 September 1990.

On this visit the lake was found to be full and there were a number of islands. The only island on which the gulls were nesting was about 500 metres north of the southern shore, opposite the Tarago tip (called New Island by Braithwaite, L.W. (1981) *Australian Wildlife Research*, 8:1357146). Unlike the other islands the breeding area was well vegetated and had obviously been the only island to have remained surrounded by water during recent periods of drought. All other islands must have been joined to the shore for they were well grazed and had little or no vegetation cover.

By pacing the perimeter we estimated the size of the island at 1.2 ha. Nests were to be found everywhere. Four transects 4 m wide were paced along the length of the island. All nests within the transects were noted and scored as containing 1 egg, 2 eggs, 3 eggs, chicks, half fledged or fledged young. Where nests were found with eggs and chicks the chicks were regarded as not hatched.

From a total of 0.32 ha surveyed there were 75 nests with 1 egg, 102 with 2 eggs and 33 with 3 eggs. Ten nests contained chicks, 23 contained half fledged young whilst 32 contained fully-fledged young.

We estimate there to be 707 nesting sites with eggs. No estimate was made of the numbers of chicks because they varied in age from just hatched to fully-fledged, and many were already free-flying birds. There were also many unoccupied nesting sites.

From the plumage of the free-flying birds it was estimated that breeding started around mid-June (P. Straw pers. obs.). No banded Silver Gulls were found. We estimated there to be 7 Black Swan and 20 Chestnut Teal also nesting on the island.

On the following day, Phil Straw paid a visit to the Lake Jindabyne colony. From his estimates the island was slightly larger in area than the Lake Bathurst island. The colony was concentrated on one end of the island and there were approximately 500 nests. There were no free-flying young so the start of breeding must have been later at Lake Jindabyne than it had been at Lake Bathurst.

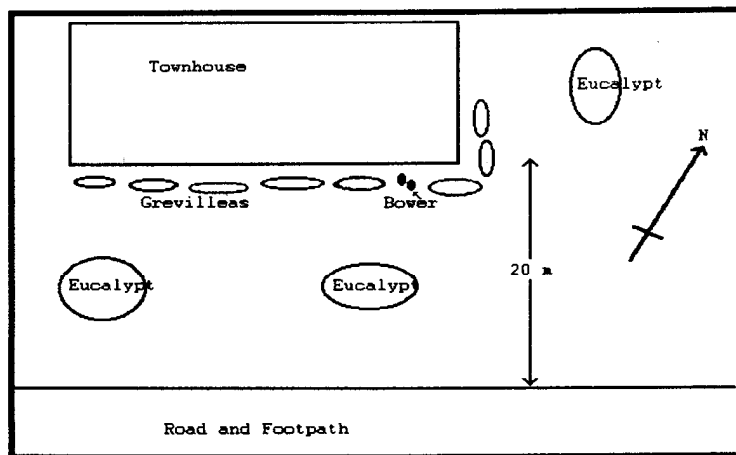
*C. Davey, 24 Bardsley Place, HOLT ACT 2615*

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### SATIN BOWERBIRD'S BOWER AT HOLDER

*Margaret Aston*

Satin Bowerbirds *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*, all of which were in green plumage, were first observed around our Holder townhouse complex during winter 1987. None were noticed during 1988, but from late July to mid September in 1989 and 1990 they were seen at irregular intervals in trees within two private courtyards, on dividing fences, and in the large area of landscaped common property. Both courtyards have terracotta bird-baths and for a time it appeared that an elephant was using the one close to the kitchen window since it needed refilling three times a day! The birds enjoyed vigorous and prolonged bathing followed by a drying out ritual on the wooden fence. Mostly only one bird was present. sometimes two, but at times four formed the group. They were not seen at any particular time of the day. In August 1989 the bird-bath sported a blue feather (perhaps from a Crimson Rosella *Platycercus elegans* as there were lots of them about) and a blue plastic bottle top. It was assumed that both females and immature males were present when one day a bird picked up a grey pebble in its bill and presented it to another bird close by. Kitchen productivity declined in reverse ratio to the level of activity in the back courtyard.



**Figure 1.** Position of bower in relation to townhouse, grevilleas, road, and path.

Returning home in early September 1990 after being absent all winter, I was entertained for a week by four Satin Bowerbirds walking and feeding on the lawn of the common property. I could not see what they were eating. One bird was noticed walking along and under a hedge of grevillea Canberra gem but a later inspection found no evidence of bower construction there.

It was not until mid-November that a blue object caught my eye while walking through the common ground adjacent to one of the townhouses and - surprise and pleasure - there was a Satin Bowerbird's bower. It is situated in a 1 m wide gap in another 1.5 m high grevillea Canberra gem planting which runs along a wall of the unit. It is just 60 cm out from the wall, and while partially protected from view by the plant growth, it is only 20 m across open lawn from a public footpath (used extensively by school children twice each weekday) and a public road (see Figure 1).

The bower appears to be constructed of eucalypt twigs (there are at least twenty eucalypt trees on the common property) and is orientated approximately north-south. It is 40 cm high and not completely closed at the top, and 50 cm in width with a "runway" axis of 40 cm. Within and around are, *inter alia*, the following blue objects - one plastic bottle top (the 1989 one?), two plastic circular pulls from the top of bottles, five 30 cm lengths of 2 mm diameter nylon cord, and a blue and white striped plastic drinking straw. The bower is probably a "practice" or "rudimentary" bower as described by Reta Vellenga (1970, *Australian Bird Bander* 8: 3-11). No birds have been seen at the bower.

Winter 1991 developments are eagerly awaited.

*Margaret Aston, 17 Hyndes Crescent, HOLDER ACT 2611*

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#### **ACT BIRDWATCHERS HOTLINE**

**Telephone 247 5530**

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

***In my opinion.....***

*(This is a new category of article for Canberra Bird Notes. We hope that members will use it to express their opinions on matters they feel should be of concern to members of the Canberra Ornithologists Group. We are delighted to have the first contribution from Dr Michael Lenz. Michael is an entomologist with the CSIRO Division of Entomology and has been an amateur ornithologist for many years, both in Germany and since 1977 in Australia. He has been a member of COG since 1977 and amongst other things has organised most of the waterbird surveys, produced three Annual Bird Reports, and assisted in the production of several others.)*

**THE ROLE OF THE AMATEUR BIRD WATCHER IN AUSTRALIA**

A recent issue of *Canberra Bird Notes* contained an article by Richard Schodde (1990, *Canberra Bird Notes* 15: 48-60) on the history and future of Australian Ornithology. This article was based on a talk that he gave to the Canberra Ornithologists Group on 8 August 1990. I was delighted to be able to read the article as I had missed Dick's original talk. I do not wish to question any aspect of the article, however, it does provide me with a good opportunity to comment on a "pet subject" of mine, the role of the amateur bird watcher in Australia.

A similar "scan" through the history of ornithology, written for a European country (leaving aside the many differences in geography, size, pattern of human settlement, population level, etc) would be distinguished by a very important feature that is less evident in Australia - the contributions of the non-professional bird watcher would form an integral part of the ornithological developments of that country (although not necessarily in all areas). In Europe in the past, and even more so today, amateurs are either interacting with the professionals or acting independently on their own and tackling ornithological problems of major concern at a level still to be achieved in Australia.

Taking the example of Germany, which I know best, amateur bird watchers and groups often lead the field in certain areas of ornithology, such as the monitoring of bird populations, and collecting data on the biology of species for the forthcoming volumes of the *Handbook of the Birds of Central Europe*. How is such a high level of amateur involvement in ornithological research achieved? What can we learn from these experiences for Australia?

In Germany, a multitude of publications (many specifically addressing the needs of the non-professional), newsletters by various bird societies, requests by scientists for assistance, and conferences and workshops, allow the individual to get a clear understanding of the ornithological issues of major importance, both regionally



and for the whole country. Participation of the amateur is promoted at three levels:

- i) by joining observer networks (eg atlas work);
- ii) by working in small teams (eg banding studies); and
- iii) by acting individually within a wider framework of objectives (eg pooling of individual census studies for the large scale monitoring of bird populations, data collection for the Handbook).

But where does the above differ from Australia? We have all that too! Well, not quite. In European countries amateurs are motivated enough to work on various topics on their own even when no "grand scheme" is organized for them, and they write up the results of their own work. So, when we see at least the first "Cabbies" (acronym for a participant in the RAOU's Australian Bird Count scheme (ABC)) independently publishing results from their study plots, we will have come of age.

I feel this is a very important point. I know that many Australian amateurs carry out their own excellent studies and publish the results. But as a whole the amateur in this country is viewed as, and used too much as simply a data collector. This is fair enough in some cases as some projects can only be carried out through a network of "data collectors", but it appears to stop there. The amateurs do not get enough encouragement and stimulus, and are not taken seriously enough. In consequence their potential to contribute to the study of Australia's avifauna is underutilized. Based on impressions from Canberra and from attending two RAOU Congresses, I feel many amateurs suffer from an inferiority complex towards the professional. It requires a change of attitude by professionals and also by bodies such as the RAOU to encourage more confidence and self-motivation among amateurs so that they will not only be part of schemes others are setting up for them, but also do their "own thing" towards contributing to a better understanding of our birds. This will not be an easy process.

Let me give an example of what I mean. In 1985 an RAOU-sponsored book, *Birds of Eucalypt Forests and Woodlands: Ecology, Conservation, Management* (Keast, A., Recher, H.F., Ford, H.A., and Saunders, D. (eds.) 1985, RAOU and Surrey Beatty & Sons: Sydney) was published. It was deservedly given great praise and won a prestige award for excellence in scientific content and presentation. However, by publishing it in a quite large format, in hardcover, with colour photos (many of birds available in countless other books), and line drawings, the price was about the \$50 mark. This put it beyond the reach of many potential readers, especially amateur bird watchers. This was a great pity. Without change to the quality of the contents, but with a more convenient size, a softcover, and by culling the drawings and all photos, except the habitat ones, it should have become more affordable. The book is rich in ideas and examples that could be followed by the Australian readership, especially amateur bird watchers; after all our forests and woodlands rate amongst the most favoured birding habitats (one needs to think only of the conservation and forest management issues to which a wider readership could have contributed). A more modest production would not have lessened the value of the book for the professional here and overseas. There is no better prize to be awarded to a book than having a wide readership gaining enjoyment and ideas from reading it. The

circumstances of producing the *Birds of Eucalypt Forests and Woodlands: Ecology, Conservation, Management* may have prevented it from winning that prize. You may accuse me of a lack of understanding of the competitive world of book publishing and you are right, but should bird books be for bird watchers or for winning publishing prizes?. This example, however, serves to illustrate the principle I am concerned about - there is a great need to cater far more consciously and deliberately for the needs of the amateur. There is already far too much valuable information locked away in several expensive Australian bird books, presumably because the productions were primarily aimed at collectors and others prepared to part with large sums of money, rather than the average bird watcher.

For a moment may I return to the German example. One element that greatly facilitates the interaction between scientists and amateurs, and favours independent work by amateurs, is the way in which at least some aspects of bird watching are organized. There is a national ornithological society, the Deutsche Ornithologen Gesellschaft (DOG), which is the German equivalent to the RAOU. At the local level individuals can join bird groups similar to our COG, these groups in turn may organize cooperation with other similar groups within a State, and most of them are now represented in an umbrella organization, the Dachverband Deutscher Avifaunisten (DDA), specifically addressing the needs of the amateur bird watcher for all of Germany. The DDA provides an important forum for quickly disseminating information on activities, publications, and meetings, it publicises requests by bird groups, professionals, and other individuals. it sponsors workshops on ornithological methods (e.g. censusing), it sets priorities, it encourages contributions to the **Handbook etc and through the local groups it organizes many field activities.** The **DDA was originally set up out of dissatisfaction among non-professional** members of the DOG because the DOG seemed to be looking too exclusively after the interests of the scientists among its members! I am pleased to say, this state of "rivalry" was quickly overcome but the new structure remained in place, to the benefit of all concerned.

So, to come back to Dick's point at the end of his article on how to get the amateur involved in his taxonomic and biogeographic endeavours. If he were working on similar problems in Germany, he could very quickly and repeatedly get his message and plea across to all ornithologists in the country by three methods:

- i) through the "announcement" section of the DOG'S journal, and that of other bird journals;
- ii) by contacting the DDA, who in turn would pass on the message via the regional bird clubs to their wide membership; and
- iii) bird banders could be approached through their respective organization.

In Australia we have some equivalent structures in place but we need to strengthen and widen them, and to complement them with new elements which aim at facilitating greater amateur involvement and interaction among ornithologists at all levels. This will mean greater discussion and consultation between the RAOU, local bird groups and associations, editors of bird journals, and interested individuals in

order to develop nationwide policies for a greater awareness and integration of ornithological activities among the professional and amateur bird watchers of this country.

A few suggestions, which may help this process:

New RAOU publications should be announced, not only in the RAOU news-

letter, but also in all other Australian bird journals, newsletters and through local bird groups. In turn the RAOU should publicise publications from other groups and associations.

The creation of a central newsletter with contributions from the RAOU, local bird groups and associations, and individuals. This newsletter could announce major activities, publicise ongoing and forthcoming bird projects, and publish requests for help etc. Australian bird watchers are a highly mobile species, so that, for example, a project in the Northern Territory may quickly become one to which Tasmanians can contribute during their travels or vice versa. Dissemination of the newsletter could occur through all existing journals and newsletters of bird clubs, both national and regional, thus ensuring nationwide distribution to an audience of bird watchers of a size which to date no single organization or group has been able to address.

The recent release of the first volume of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds* (Higgins, P. and Marchant, S. (eds) 1990, Oxford University Press: Melbourne) and the request for material for the forthcoming volumes could serve more than anything else as the vehicle to get local groups and individuals of different levels of ornithological interests together to work for a national goal. Everyone who has read the first volume of the *Handbook* will be impressed not only by the wealth of information that was put together, but also by the numerous questions that still need to be addressed in understanding the biology of the species dealt with. The same will apply to species which are to be covered in the next volumes. Much activity could be directed to studying these species as part of the preparation for the forthcoming volumes. But the areas in greatest need of attention must be identified as early as possible. Again the "central newsletter" mentioned above could serve the purpose of getting these requests for information out to the widest possible audience. Local bird groups ought to encourage, and even organize participation. Contributions to this national project should, at the same time, greatly advance the understanding of their region's bird life.

I know that the size of our country, the uneven distribution of ornithologists, the costs of travelling and other factors will make any efforts to bring the ornithologists of this country closer together so much harder than in places like Europe. But the general lack of resources, and cuts to the resources currently available to professionals to undertake the work on the Australian avifauna they used to and still need to do (see also Dick's article) make it more important than ever to encourage and foster contributions by amateur bird watchers. This means that we must strengthen existing

structures and develop new ones which would help to educate amateur bird watchers and provide them with the self-confidence and motivation that they need.

In many of my above comments I am aware that I have simplified or overstated points, but I felt by doing so that there would be a better chance of provoking thought and discussion on these issues to the benefit of us all.

*Michael Lenz, 8 Suttor St, Ainslie ACT 2602*

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### **ODD OBS**

## **COLLARED SPARROWHAWK EATS COMMON STARLING**

*Delia Johnson*

On 30 April 1991, at about 1 pm, I was standing at the window with my binoculars counting for my Garden Bird Survey chart the number of Silvereyes *Zosterops lateralis* among a flock of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* in an almost bare maple tree. Suddenly they scattered in all directions as a hawk clutching a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* hurtled past and landed on grass only 10 m from me.

It looked round fiercely and plucked the starling between stares. As it faced me its finely red-barred breast and thin yellow legs showed clearly, with fainter barring under its square-ended tail. The head was slaty grey with no facial markings, it had a reddish collar, dark wings, and gingery "shorts". I called my husband and after due consideration we concluded it was a Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus*.

As soon as the sparrowhawk had landed, our resident Australian Magpie-larks *Grallina cyanoleuca* flew onto nearby wires and called noisily. When they became quiet several other birds flew into the maple overlooking the scene, fussing and calling. The sparrowhawk glared less frequently as, quite unperturbed, it pecked at the starling's exposed flesh. Feathers were scattered all around.

Turning my binoculars on the birds in the maple I saw a White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis* and two Golden Whistlers *Pachycephala pectoralis*. When the sparrowhawk flew off, carrying the carcass, they all took flight in the opposite direction.

*Delia Johnson, 6 Dale Place, STIRLING ACT 2611*

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT 1990 I

Dear Members,

Before reporting to you about COG's activities in 1990, I would first like to take a step back and look briefly at how our role is defined in the constitution, how we interpreted that roll, and how we organised ourselves to carry out that role in 1990.

COG's objectives defined in the constitution are very broad, and amount basically to the fostering of interest in, and the study of, birds, especially in the Canberra region. In interpreting this role, we give talks; conduct outings and camp-outs; participate in educational activities and exhibitions; develop, sponsor and carry out a range of projects involving the study and recording of birds; organise and participate in programmes aimed at conserving bird habitats; prepare and distribute publications; liaise with and provide expert advice and comments to governments on development proposals; cooperate, and in some instances provide financial support to groups with similar aims; and provide management and funding support for these activities. To handle this on a voluntary basis, we have a committee of 19 people, and sub-committees or panels involved with projects, conservation, assessment of rarity reports and fund-raising. Additionally, individuals provide help with computing and with distribution of publications. From time to time we set up short term or volunteer groups for special tasks. As you can see, we are a large, diverse, and very active group. I will come back to this point later.

The Projects Subcommittee provides the focus for our projects work and studies. Chaired by Hugh Possingham in 1990, the Subcommittee did some excellent work in organising and fine tuning the COG area database, in setting up special interest panels to study particular bird groups, and in initiating a new grants scheme for members undertaking approved studies.

COG's major ongoing project is, of course, the Atlas of Birds of the ACT. McComas Taylor's final database report (after review by the Committee) was accepted by the National Capital Planning Authority in mid 1990. A major effort has now been mounted to raise funds through a raffle and a twitchathon for preparation and printing of a book presenting the results of the Atlas. I am delighted to report that these efforts have been successful, and that a generous response from members will enable us to add to this more than \$4500 from sponsorship, and sales of at least 150 copies. Most pleasing of all is that COG was advised that it is to receive \$10 000 for the Atlas under the ACT Heritage Grant Scheme. Many thanks to McComas, the Fundraising Subcommittee, and to those members who responded to the questionnaire.

Recognising the likely increasing difficulty in obtaining government sponsorship of major new projects, and the likely increasing costs of handling and storage of bird survey data, the Committee reviewed COG's financial position and implemented

a financial management plan to ensure that in the long term COG's operations, and especially the projects, remain viable. This plan involved:

transfer of some expenses from the projects to the operating account (with a resulting small rise in 1991 subscriptions)

establishment of priority for contributions to other groups with similar objectives

setting up the fund-raising subcommittee.

Conservation activities undertaken by both the Conservation subcommittee headed by Jo Vandermark and individual committee members included:

opposition to proposed Sutton Road Motor Racing complex (project abandoned by the ACT Government in late 1990)

potential destruction of bushland by proposed new roads to Gungahlin (outcome not yet determined)

trail bike tracks in prime bushland at Mt Stromlo (opposition continuing)

Lake Ginninderra (comments on development proposals)

Jerrabomberra Wetlands (participating in planning process)

policy for growing native plants in public places (submission and continuing discussions)

COG also provided comments on: the ACT Government's Environment Policy; planning the Canberra Nature Park; and representations on policies for collecting native birds.

#### Education, Exhibitions, and Publications

COG participated in two major exhibitions and a science fair during 1990. BIOTA'90 in October was particularly successful with strong public interest in our display, publications, bird tapes, and projects. Excellent work was done by Bill Graham, Sue Armstrong, Jo Vandermark, Barbara Allen and many volunteer members at these events.

#### Meetings, Walks, and Outings

It is most encouraging that attendance at monthly meetings has almost invariably been in the 100 to 150 range. Thanks to Hugh Possingham and Stephen Mugford who organised an interesting series of speakers.

Malcolm Fyfe organised some very good walks in the Canberra region with usually, more than 20 people attending. As in the past, patronage of weekend campouts has been patchy.

#### COG Publications

Barbara Allan has continued to do an increasingly onerous task on our fattening monthly *Gang-Gang* as have David Purchase and Grahame Clark on *Canberra Bird Notes*. The Annual Bird Report is of some concern as the amount of data being incorporated increases. The ACT Bird Hotline, updated regularly by McComas Taylor, has been well supported.

#### Cooperation with other Groups

COG has representation on the Conservation Council of the South-East Region and Canberra, and has worked with the Council and other groups (such as the Field Naturalists Association of Canberra and the Society for Growing Australian Plants) on conservation issues.

The Committee has an RAOU liaison officer, Dick Schodde, and a representative on the Barren Grounds Bird Observatory, Tony Lawson.

Returning now to my original theme, there is one aspect of COG's tradition about which I must be critical. Every year the retiring committee goes through the embarrassing task of having to find people to replace retirees. I have no intention of scolding, but would have to say that my enjoyment of COG membership has increased greatly since I became a member of the committee and therefore more involved in the group's affairs. We are involved in a wide range of activities, and even if your only qualification is enthusiasm you will find it a satisfying and useful outlet. Recognising that most people lead busy lives, the work is shared round. If you think you might be able to contribute, you can!

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Noel Luff as Treasurer, and of retiring Committee members David McDonald (whose wise counsel and organising ability are greatly appreciated) Hugh Possingham and Stephen Mugford.

*Bruce Lindenmayer, February 1991*

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## OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

One of the major bird stories of 1990 was the finding of the first specimen of the Night Parrot *Geopsittacus occidentalis* since 1912 (although there were four confirmed sightings in 1977-81 during the course of the RAOU Atlas of Australian Birds). The circumstances of the discovery were rather unusual and outlined by the finder, Walter Boles of the Australian Museum, in the December 1990 issue of the Australian Bird Study Association's newsletter.

He was in a vehicle travelling south along the Diamantina Developmental Road from Mount Isa towards Boulia in western Queensland in company with another vehicle when both vehicles stopped about 36 km north of Boulia to look at some Australian Pratincoles *Stilta isabella*. Whilst the other vehicle drove off to look more closely at the pratincoles, Walter stayed in the stationary vehicle. When the other vehicle returned it parked behind Walter. Walter then got out of his vehicle and walked to the passenger's side of the other vehicle and spoke to the driver. After speaking to the driver he turned away and looked down to see the carcass of a Night Parrot on the roadside next to his foot.

The adult bird was almost certainly a road casualty and appears to have lain at the roadside for sometime. It was quite dry and the soft tissue had been removed by ants. It has not been possible to determine its sex.

There is no way of saying how long it had lain there, it could be anywhere between three and twelve months according to Dr. P. Canfield, a veterinary pathologist from University of Sydney. In the RAOU Newsletter of December 1990 the possibility is raised that it could have been hit by some other vehicle and transported on the radiator or bull-bars to the location where it was found.

The *Canberra Times* sponsored an Outdoor Art Show in conjunction with the 1991 Canberra Festival. The advertisement for this appeared regularly in the paper and used an illustration of two Canada Geese *Branta canadensis*, which of course do not occur in Australia. What a pity that our local newspaper cannot even be bothered to use an Australian bird to advertise a Canberra Festival attraction. In a similar vain when the *Canberra Times* produced a supplement for the Pialligo Apple Blossom Festival last October, a male House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* was used in the page heading. Why can't our press, and the other people involved, take a little extra time and effort and use Australian native birds?

It may not be known to all my readers that Canada Geese were introduced into the south-west of Western Australia between 1912 and 1920, and again at a later date, but they did not become established. They did, however, become established in New Zealand after introduction there in the early 1900s (Long, J.L. (1981) Introduced birds of the world. Reed: Sydney).



The National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Australian Customs Service have established a joint task force to investigate the problem of fauna trafficking. In conjunction with this a special Customs Fauna Hotline has been set up so that if you see anything suspicious you can inform them of the details. The number is 008 02 5691.

Recently an interesting study came to my attention - a study that proves objectively what has always been known subjectively. In a paper entitled "Factors affecting colony formation in Leach's Storm-Petrel" (Podolsky, R.H., and Kress, S.W. (1989) *Auk* 106: 332-335) the authors provide objective evidence to support the theory that large amounts of noise are produced at seabird colonies in order to attract other birds of the same species. The theory is that birds produce noise to attract further birds to the colony and therefore the presence of many birds making a very loud noise is a strong indicator to others that a particular site is both safe and productive. This seems obvious when you think about it, but how does one prove it? The paper by Podolsky and Kress shows how.

If you are interested in colonial waterbirds, you may wish to know that there is a scientific, non-profit organisation dedicated to the study and conservation of colonial waterbirds. This is the International Colonial Waterbird Society and it publishes the journal *Colonial Waterbirds*. Membership is \$US20 and further details can be obtained from the society at 563 Fairview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K1M 0X4, Canada.

Combined with the judicious use of Australian plants, the most effective way of attracting birds to a garden is by installing and maintaining a bird-bath. However, like many facilities offered to humans, their increasing use requires the establishment of rules to cover their use. The operator of a popular bird-bath in southern Canberra has come up with the following rules to cover the use of her facility:

#### **BIRDBATH REGULATIONS**

1. The bath is for bathing and drinking only, not for singing or chatting up the birds. There is ample room in the trees for non-aquatic sports.
2. DO NOT defecate into the bath. Currawongs please note.
3. Not more than eight starlings may be in the bath at the same time.
4. Indigenous species take priority over starlings, sparrows, mynas, and other exotic species (other than goldfinches).
5. No fighting in the bath on peril of expulsion by the management.
6. Drying facilities are available in the neighbouring tree.

7. Birds are warned not to dry themselves on the grass. DANGER OF CATS.
8. Sparrowhawk raids are uncommon but may occur. Keep an eye out and warn your friends.
9. Mixed bathing is permitted at all times. Galahs, Crimson Rosellas, and Eastern Rosellas wishing to avoid crowded sessions are advised to come for their drink early, at sunrise.
10. Small shy native birds, robins, Yellow-tailed Thornbills, Eastern Spinebills, and honeyeaters will find mid-morning the least threatening time of day.
11. All birds are advised that in hot dry weather the bath is apt to become shallow. Excessive splashing should be avoided at such times. Starlings please note.
12. NO RAPTORS ARE ALLOWED, BY ORDER
13. On frosty mornings please be patient. The management will break the ice and restore normal service as soon as possible.

Beelzebub (Signed)  
P.A. to The Manager  
DELIA'S DIVE-IN

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### **ODD OBS**

#### **OBSERVATION OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR IN COMMON MYNAS**

*Hazel and Allan Wright*

On a bright sunny morning in September 1988, during a routine walk around the Bibaringa paddock (Atlas Grid 50), our attention was arrested by an excessive amount of noise coming from a nearby tree.

Closer inspection revealed that two Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* were attempting to enter a nest hollow already occupied by an Eastern Rosella *Platycercus eximius*. A second rosella was acting defensively and trying to protect its mate while the mynas attacked unrelentingly. The struggle was observed for approximately five minutes, at which time the rosellas flew away.

It was the first and only time we saw Common Mynas in the Grid 50 although they had been seen regularly in the vicinity of the Bulga Creek homestead (Grid 51) approximately 1.5 kilometres away.

*Hazel & Allan Wright, 6 Bunny Street, WESTON ACT 2611*

## REVIEW

**Bander's Aid: Supplement Number One by Ken Rogers, Annie Rogers and Danny Rogers (1990). Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union Report No 67: Melbourne. Pp 75, soft cover. \$10.**

In *Canberra Bird Notes* 14(2) I reviewed "Banders Aid: A Guide to Ageing and Sexing Bush Birds". The first supplement to that excellent book has now been published and it re-emphasises how cooperation between banders can increase our knowledge of Australian birds by pooling knowledge. The supplement contains accounts of 33 species not covered in the original Banders Aid. Of these 33 species 7 are waders which makes the Bush Bird title no longer correct. There are also replacement accounts for 11 species covered in the original, and additional information for 38 species. This means there are now 145 species covered by the two publications. There is a useful index at the back of the supplement that applies to both the original Guide and this Supplement. This obviates the need to check in both books when looking for a species account. The supplement also covers two groups of look-alike birds when held in the hand. The first key covers the Quails and Button-quails and the second covers four of the female Fairy-wrens whose ranges overlap.

It is good to see that the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union is now publishing the supplement and supporting the banders who are grouping together to produce these useful volumes. It is in cooperative projects like this that the RAOU can assist amateurs to make an extremely valuable contribution to Australian ornithology.

Again I searched for data from the Canberra region and this time was delighted to find that some data from the local district has indeed found its way into the supplement. The account of the White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphus* contains data from near Lake George contributed by Ian Rowley. However, given the strength that the Canberra area once exhibited in the banding field perhaps there is room for more contributions.

I repeat my original review comment that every bander should have a copy of this book, not only to help age and sex birds, but also to act as a reminder that a great deal more needs to be done. and can be done; by the amateur in Australian ornithology.

Both the original Banders Guide and this supplement are available at \$20 and \$10 respectively (including postage) from the RAOU at 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria, 3039.

*Grahame Clark*

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## LETTER TO THE EDITORS

### STARLINGS AND CHIMNEYS

4 July 1990

Further to Delia Johnson's article on a Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* falling down her chimney (*Canberra Bird Notes* 15: 38). They fall down mine (or rather, down the old fashioned metal pipe ventilator in our bathroom) so regularly that we have lost count. This puzzled us until we noticed Common Starlings (and House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* who fall down as well) flying in under the tin "hat" on the chimney to peck at cobwebs there. They evidently find the cobwebs in chimneys, with their captive insects and attendant spiders, a useful food supply.

*Ann Somers, 14 Lister Crescent, AINSLIE ACT 2602*

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### ODD OBS

#### CRESTED PIGEONS IN EAST MELBA, ACT

*David Purchase and Shirley Purchase*

In recent years the number of reports of Crested Pigeons *Ocyphaps lophotes* in the suburbs of Canberra and the surrounding area has increased.

We have lived in Orchard Place, Melba, since April 1973 and have always kept records of the birds seen or heard in the vicinity of our house. Since February 1976 these records have been documented daily. We frequently walk in the area.

At 0900 hrs on 9 September 1990, we were in the back garden when our attention was attracted by the characteristic "whistle" made by the wings of a Crested Pigeon. We located the bird which by then was perched on the powerlines at the rear of a neighbour's back garden. It remained perched for 4 mins, allowing us a good view, before it flew off in a north-easterly direction. This was the first time we had seen a Crested Pigeon in the area.

Since then we have made the following observations of Crested Pigeons in the vicinity of our home: 10.09.90, 1 flew north-east over a neighbour's house; 11.10.90, 2 flew up from grass alongside the north-east corner of Melba Oval; 26.11.90, 1 in grass alongside the north-east corner of Melba Oval; 31.03.91, 3 feeding on grass seeds in the undeveloped area by Grundy Place in south-west Evatt; and 15.04.91, 2 flew north over a neighbour's house.

*D. & A.S. Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, MELBA ACT 2615*

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## RARITIES PANEL NEWS

The highlights of this list are two "firsts" for Canberra. The most unexpected was the Black Honeyeater *Certhionyx niger* recorded in a garden at Charnwood. This was a first record for the Canberra district. The bird was a fully plumaged male which obligingly allowed its photograph to be taken. The other was two Lewin's Honeyeaters *Meliphaga lewinii* recorded at Gungahlin Hill nature reserve. This species can be expected in the east of our area but has never before been recorded in Canberra.

There were two other interesting honeyeater records, two Little Friarbirds *Philemon citreogularis* at Murrumbateman and a Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* at Kambah. In addition there were two records that have come to light from October 1988. One was a Regent Honeyeater at Chifley and the other was a Painted Honeyeater *Grantiella picta* near Tharwa. This was the first record of a Painted Honeyeater for many years.

An unusual breeding record was that of the Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii* which raised two young at Charnwood.

This year there were 7 Common Koel *Eudynamis scolopacea* records between October 1990 and January 1991 although only one record was from the northside of Canberra.

The population of Peaceful Doves *Geopelia placida* in Atlas Grid 50 seems to be continuing to grow, the latest record in October 1990 was of ten birds.

Recordings of raptors included White-bellied Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* in December and January and a Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* at Molonglo Gorge, a location where this species is not usually seen.

Finally, another sighting of European Greenfinches *Carduelis chloris* along the Molonglo away from Canberra itself could be an indication that the birds may be adjusting to the local environment and starting to spread wherever there are introduced tree species such as willows *Salix* sp.

## RARITIES PANEL ENCORSED LIST NO 28

### Category 3

Little Egret

1;1 Jan 90;N.Luff;Kelly's Swamp

Glossy Ibis

1;16 Dec 90;G.Clark;Ballalaba Bridge, Shoalhaven River

Whistling Kite

1;1 Sep 90;J.Bissett;Fairlight Rd, near Uriarra Crossing  
2;30 Sep 90;J.Bissett;Fairlight Rd, near Uriarra Crossing  
1;9 Dec 90;G.Clark;Molonglo Gorge

White-breasted Sea-Eagle

1;26 Dec 90;J.Bissett;Smith's Crossing, Gudgenby River  
1;1 Jan 91;H.Wright/M. Fyfe;LBG  
1;5 Jan 91;J.Bissett;LBGE

Brown Quail

8;12715,26,28 Nov 90;J.Bissett;Mt Arawang, Chapman  
1;24 Dec 90;J.Bissett;Jerrabomberra Wetlands  
1;5 Jan 91;J.Bissett;Jerrabomberra Wetlands  
1;6/7 Nov 91;J.Bissett;Mt Arawang Chapman

Peaceful Dove

10;6 Oct 90;H.Wright;Atlas Grid 50

Rainbow Lorikeet

3;8 Nov 90;K.Hahne;Aranda

Little Lorikeet

4;1 Nov 90;J.Bissett;Fisher  
1;12 Dec 90;H.Possingham;Campbell Park

Common Koel

1;29 Oct 90;D.McDonald;Kambah  
1M;2 Nov 90;R.Elliott;Aranda 1M;8  
Dec 90;S.Wilson;Kambah 1;18 Dec  
90;J.Bounds;Weston  
1;18/19 Dec 90;D.McDonald;Kambah  
1;25 Dec 90;J.Bissett;Kambah  
1;2 Jan 91;H.Possingham;Duffy

Pink Robin

1M;30 Apr 89;M.Brookfield;New Chums Rd, Brindabella Range

Red-capped Robin

1M;14 Oct 89;G.Jackman;Cook  
Pair,2 Juv;Oct 90;J.Price;Charnwood

Little Friarbird

2;16 Oct 90;J.Black;Murrumbateman  
2;1 Jan 91;J.Black;Murrumbateman

Regent Honeyeater  
2;10 Oct 88;B.Hetherington;Chifley  
2;20 Oct 90;D.McDonald;Kambah

Lewin's Honeyeater  
2;21 Aug 90;J.Gleeson;Gungahlin Hill N.R.

Painted Honeyeater  
1;Oct 88;J.Morse;Tharwa

Black Honeyeater  
1M;9-11 Jan 91;J.Price;Charnwood

Category 2  
European Greenfinch  
2;2 Sep 90;N.Luff;Coppin's Crossing

Unusual Location  
Australian Pelican  
1;7 Jul 90;M.Dow;Corin Dam

Possible Escapee  
Rainbow Lorikeet  
2;GBS 88/90;P.Veerman;West Kambah  
2;W from 26/2/90;D.Cowley;Macquarie

Escapee  
Port Lincoln Ringneck  
1;17 Nov 90;G.Barwell;Campbell  
1;1 Oct 90;D.Driscoll;Campbell

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## FOR SALE

### 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.

Available from COG, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608 or monthly meetings.

*Projects Subcommittee:*

Malcolm Fyfe (Secretary - Ph. 254 3310), Grahame Clark, Chris Davey, Michael Lenz, David Purchase.

*Rarities Panel:*

Bryan FitzGerald (Secretary - Ph. 248 5140), Barry Baker, Graeme Chapman, Grahame Clark, Mark Clayton, Jack Holland, Bruce Male.

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**BIRD SONGS OF CANBERRA**

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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.

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**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.

**Available from COG, PO Box 301, CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608 or at monthly meetings.**



*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 Australian Capital Territory and surrounding area (i.e. New South Wales coast north to Jervis Bay, and west to the Riverina). Contributions can be sent to the editors do David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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