

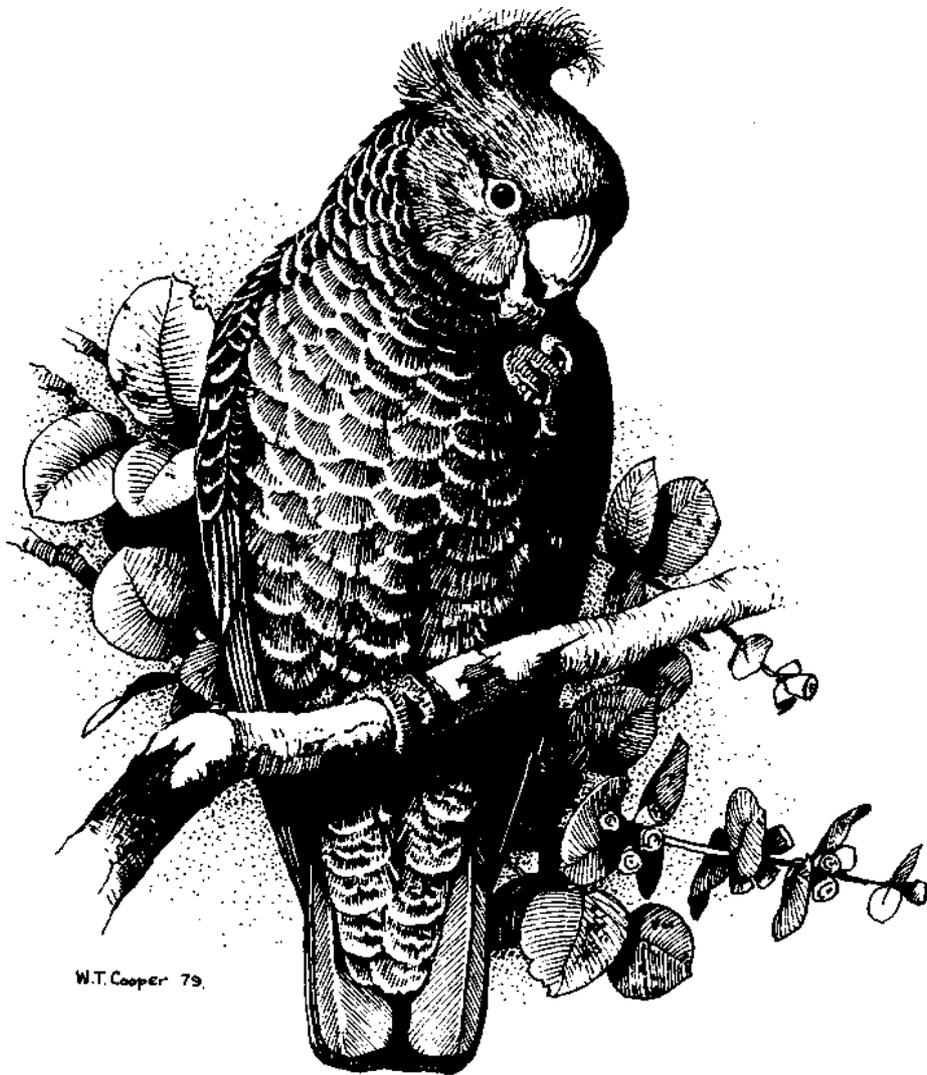
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# CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

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## CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP INC.

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

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(Continued inside back cover)

## A SURVEY OF THE NESTING HOLLOWES ON BLACK MOUNTAIN

John R. Taylor

Hollows in trees are a valuable ecological resource. Black Mountain Nature Reserve dominates the Canberra landscape yet very little is known about the availability of suitable hollows within the reserve that can be used as nesting sites for arboreal mammals and native birds. The vegetation is largely open forest containing Stringy Bark *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, Scribbly Gum *E. rossii* and Brittle Gum *E. mannifera*. The latter two species are known to form hollows. Fifteen species of birds, three species of possum and seven species of bats known to use hollows occupy Black Mountain Reserve throughout the year. This study gives an indication of the number of hollows available and reports on the high usage of hollows by Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* in *E. rossii* and *E. macrorhyncha* woodland.

### Introduction

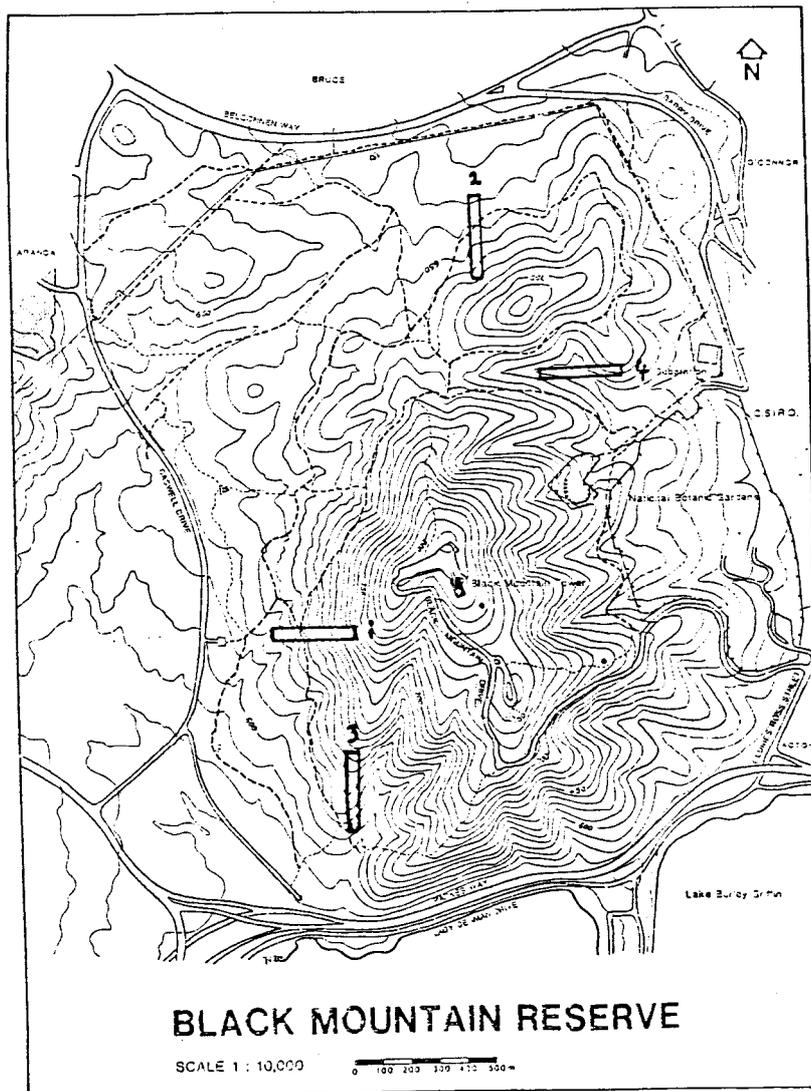
Black Mountain Nature Reserve was gazetted as a Public Park on 28 June 1973 with an area of 518.6 ha (Anon 1973). It is a timbered hilltop bounded by busy roads and is 812 m above sea level at its highest point. The reserve contains several fire trails and walking tracks.

In most areas the soils are shallow and skeletal with considerable rock content (Kukolic 1976). Few areas have a deep profile formation. The climate is continental (Gilmour *et al.* 1987) with a mean annual rainfall of 600mm and a mean annual temperature of 13 °C (Adomeit *et al.* 1987).

No detailed study of the vegetation of Black Mountain has been published. Elliott and Douglas (1972) prepared a preliminary vegetation map, and a more detailed study was undertaken by Ingwersen in 1975-76 but remains unpublished. Shorthouse (1979) described the vegetation as *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha* - *E. rossii* with native understory. This description should also include the species *E. mannifera* which was found to be common in this study.

Black Mountain is the only hill in the Canberra region that was not cleared of tree cover by the turn of the century. This was largely because of the poor soil not being adaptable to the pasture improvement methods available in 1900 (Pryor 1982). Although it was partially cleared, it retained some cover of low but fairly dense forest. This would explain the number of large old Eucalypts still standing on the upper slopes.

The objectives of this study were to determine the number and nature of nesting hollows on Black Mountain. In addition, their use by animals and birds was also recorded.



**Figure 1.** Location of sampling sites on Black Mountain.

**Study Area and Methods**

To avoid bias towards more densely treed areas, four sampling sites were chosen prior to inspection of the mountain (see Figure 1). They were to be representative of all the vegetation on Black Mountain by reference to Elliott and Douglas' 1972 study. Each site was 2 ha and located 200 m from the boundary fence extending as a strip 50 m by 400 m towards the summit (Figure 1). The details of the sites are:

*Site 1* faced west ending on the upper slope of the mountain. The trees consisted of *E. rossii* and *E. mannifera* with the larger trees confined to a creek and the upper slope.

*Site 2* faced north with trees that were generally tall thin *E. macrorhyncha* with a few tall large *E. mannifera* on the upper slope.

*Site 3* faced south and was timbered by *E. macrorhyncha* with scattered older *E. mannifera*.

*Site 4* faced east in the saddle between Little Black Mountain and Black Mountain. There was a mixture of *E. rossii* and *E. macrorhyncha* throughout.

Each site was surveyed by examining every tree within the plot and recording the position of those with nesting hollows. (Nesting hollows were defined as holes in trees apparently large enough to be occupied by an animal or bird.) Trees with nesting hollows had their circumference measured at breast height, and a clinometer was used to calculate the height of the tree, height of the first limb, and height of each hollow.

Observations of each hollow were made over a number of visits in the early morning and evening during September and October 1988. Signs of occupation were noted. These included birds arriving at or leaving a hollow, feathers around a hollow, and recent chewing or scratch marks. The interiors of the observed hollows were not inspected.

## Results

Fifty-nine trees were located with a total of 117 visible hollows (Table 1). Twelve hollows were occupied by parrots and three by bees. Those occupied by bees are not included in the analysis that follows. The species and characteristics of the trees with active hollows are shown in Table 2.

One active nesting hollow was found in *E. macrorhyncha* and the rest in either *E. mannifera* or *E. rossii*. This suggests that *E. macrorhyncha* forms fewer hollows than the other eucalypt species observed on Black Mountain.

There were generally only one or two hollows per tree, although the taller the tree the more hollows there were. This trend could relate to the age of the tree. The majority of hollows were in trees between 15-30 metres tall, with 1 to 3 hollows.

Table 1. Number of trees with visible hollows in each site.

Site	1	2	3	4	Total
No. of trees with hollows	18	12	8	21	59
No. of hollows	42	21	11	43	117
Mean no. of hollows per tree	2.33	1.75	1.38	2.05	
No. of active hollows	4	5	1	2	12
No. of hollows with recent marks	1	0	1	3	5

Table 2. Characteristics of trees with active hollows.

Number of trees with active hollows: *E. macrorhyncha* 1; *E. rossii* 6; *E. mannifera* 5.

Circumference at breast height (m)	Mean	Range
	2.33	1.7 - 2.45
Height (m)	24.9	21 - 29.8
No. of dead branches	2.6	1 - 6
No. of hollows	2.5	1 - 6
Height of hollow	13.2	8.5 - 18

The survey found that there were an average of 7.4 trees with hollows per hectare and approximately 15 hollows per hectare. There were estimated to be 1.5 active hollows per hectare.

An estimation of the number of trees with nesting hollows in Black Mountain Nature Reserve was calculated using the formula  $Y = Ny$

Where Y = estimate of total number of trees  
 N = area of Black Mountain  
 y = average number of trees with hollows per hectare  
 = y/n  
 n = number of units sampled  
 Y = 3825 trees

Using the same formula there are estimated to be 778 trees with active hollows on Black Mountain. The estimate of the total number of nesting hollows was 7585.

Twenty per cent of the 59 trees located with hollows were occupied by parrots with Crimson Rosellas observed in 11 hollows and a pair of Eastern Rosellas *P. eximius* in another hollow. White bird feathers were seen around one hollow in Site 1. Each active hollow was found near Native Cherry *Exocarpos cupressiformis*. In three sites water was available in nearby creeks and in a dam located in the fourth. No other bird species were seen in, or around, any of the hollows.

Crimson Rosellas appeared to prefer nesting sites in tall, live *E. rossii* or *E. mannifera*. There did not appear to be any difference between these species in the number of hollows used by Crimson Rosellas.

**Profile of a Typical Crimson Rosella Nesting Hollow Tree on Black Mountain:** It is most likely to be a large mature live *E. rossii* or *E. mannifera* between 17 - 27 metres tall with one active hollow. It is possible that there will be less competition for the use of the tree if only one hollow is occupied. The tree will be close to water and a food source. In most cases hollows were located within a few metres of Native Cherry trees. On a number of occasions, Crimson Rosellas were seen feeding on this bush and returning to a nearby hollow.

### **Discussion**

The survey showed a high usage rate of nesting hollows of approximately 20 per cent. This suggests that there may be a shortage of suitable nesting hollows for rosellas. This is supported by the number of hollows seen with recent markings around the entrance, which may indicate an active seeking of nesting sites by birds and/or other animals.

There does not appear to be any relationship between the height of a tree containing a hollow and the use and availability of that hollow. Active hollows were found from 8.5 to 18 m above the ground. However, the majority of active hollows were in live trees from 19 to 27 m tall with only one nesting hollow. Availability of food and water may play a part in the selection of nesting hollows.

Sites 1 and 4 had a higher number of hollows per tree than sites 2 and 3 (see Table 1). This was because trees with hollows were much older and larger than the surrounding forest. Sites 2 and 3 were in areas that were not so steep and therefore more likely to have been cleared in the past. In these sites the trees with hollows were generally on the steeper slopes.

Both *E. rossii* and *E. mannifera* are characterised by dead branches with rotting hollows, spouts and knotholes (Brooker and Kleinig, 1983). All *Platycercus* spp. are known to nest in hollow limbs or spouts of trees (Slater *et al.* 1986). In this study, male parrots of both species were seen to enter nesting hollows on many occasions (I took the darker-plumaged bird of a pair to be the male). It is also characteristic of the genus for the male to feed the female and chicks until two or three weeks after fledgling (Lendon 1983).

In the ACT native trees are protected under the Nature Conservation Act and it is an offence to cut down or damage a tree on government land without a permit. However, this does not apply to leased land.

### Conclusions

Hollows in trees are an important natural resource and are used for nesting and roosting by a wide range of native birds, bats and arboreal mammals. A project involving the use of artificial nesting hollows in Wombat State Forest in Victoria showed that they were used by three species of possum, four species of bat and six species of native birds (Breckwoldt 1983). About half the Australian species of possums and gliders use tree holes for diurnal shelter and breeding sites (Menkhorst 1984). On Black Mountain, three species of possum and seven species of bat potentially use hollows in trees (Kukolic 1976) as well as 15 species of native birds. Bats use hollows in trees to provide protection from predators and allow modification of a microclimate (Tidemann and Flavel 1987).

Various studies in Australia have shown that the loss of natural hollows result in a significant reduction in the numbers of those species which are dependent on hollows for shelter (Tidemann and Flavel 1987). In a study of the Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii*, it was shown that during the last 10 to 15 years increased and changing land-use practises have greatly reduced the breeding and distribution of this parrot (Webster 1988). Of particular concern is the reduction of box woodland in the Young district in NSW, the area with the highest concentration of nesting sites (Durant pers. comm.).

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*John R. Taylor, 53 Skinner Street, COOK ACT 2614*

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## ODD OB

### POWERFUL OWL WITH PIED CURRAWONG

*Harriett Swift*

A number of instances of appalling behaviour by the Pied Currawong *Strepera graculina* were catalogued in various papers in *Canberra Bird Notes* 15(1), March 1990. It may interest readers to know that the Pied Currawong does not have things all its own way.

In March 1990, at Doctor George Mountain near Bega, I observed a pair of Powerful Owls *Ninox strenua* which had caught a Pied Currawong. The owls, which I had seen a number of times in an area of rainforest gully, were perched on a branch with the remains of a glider and the Pied Currawong, both held by the female's claws. There may have been other prey there, but it was difficult to see as, although it was mid-afternoon, the light was dim.

*Harriett Swift, 21/3 Lane-Poole Place, YARRALUMLA ACT 2600*

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## STRANGE BEHAVIOUR BY AUSTRALIAN MAGPIES

Ann Somers

There is a large population of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* in the vicinity of our house, and last summer this included many juveniles. One afternoon while I was weeding I heard a commotion and saw a young magpie fluttering and hanging upside down by one foot in the flowering Cherry Tree, with other magpies fluttering around it. I assumed the bird was caught and because of this I thought it was being attacked by the other magpies. I walked across to the Cherry Tree to try and release it, but on my approach the magpie flew away, and I assumed it had managed to free itself. I noticed that its foot and leg were clean, so I looked the area over carefully, expecting to find some string or cotton caught in the twigs where it had been, but there were only a few slashed and pierced leaves to be seen.

A little while later there was another commotion and I looked up to see another bird (or possibly the same one) hanging upside down by one leg and struggling wildly in the same tree, again with an excited crowd interacting. I went over and again the bird flew off, leaving only some slashed leaves. This performance was repeated several more times and it seemed the birds were playing. More than one bird hung upside down. They did a lot of fluttering getting into position, and the other magpies were all very excited and fluttering about as well, but on a number of occasions I was able to see one central bird hanging by one leg and swinging gently. I could not tell, though, whether they were deliberately piercing the leaves and putting one foot through to hang, or whether they were gripping a stem to hang from, with the leaves just getting torn and pierced in the general commotion. They seemed to me to be stabbing the leaves. On other occasions I noticed magpies hanging upside down by one foot from the clothesline, fluttering and struggling and giving every appearance of being caught. They never were caught, and there was invariably an excited gang interacting with them.

I also noticed the young magpies wrestling and fighting in what appeared to be play. One bird would lie on its back, legs in the air, and another, or a group would "attack" it. At other times two birds would roll around on the lawn grappling with one another. Some of these confrontations were no doubt genuine; but usually the "attacked" bird showed no obvious signs of distress, and on more than one occasion I observed the "loser" get up, follow its "attacker", and lie down again in front of the other bird, apparently begging for more.

It can readily be argued that this "fighting" behaviour, although it appears playful, is actually concerned with establishment of dominance and preparation for survival. But what are these birds preparing for when they hang upside down by one foot?

Ann Somers, 14 Lister Crescent, AINSLIE ACT 2602

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## SOME OBSERVATIONS FROM "BERREBANGALO" NEAR GUNNING, NSW

*Michael T. Rowe*

Tuesday 12 February was a particularly beautiful evening, mild, clear and still, with masses of insects in the air - ideal for bird watching. I took a short drive from "Berrebangalo" along the Lade Vale Road, frequently stopping to observe flocks of Red-rumped Parrots *Psephotus haematonotus*, Crimson Rosellas *Platycercus elegans* and Eastern Rosellas *P. eximius* - which are very plentiful along this road, when my attention was drawn to some small birds feeding at the road verge and clearly doing some acrobatics. They were in actual fact a small loose mixed flock of Goldfinches *Carduelis carduelis*, House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* and Diamond Firetails *Emblema guttata*. Several of the Diamond Firetails were fluttering up and perching on the overhanging paspalum seedheads, weighing the seedheads to the ground when they and the other birds had stripped the seedheads they continued along to another stalk and so on for some time, until they were at last disturbed by a Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*.

The evening was particularly enjoyable as traffic along this road is virtually nil so the birds don't get disturbed. Further along, in a grove of wattles, a Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula* was feeding a young bird which was out of the nest. There were also small flocks of Yellow-rumped Thornbills *Acanthiza chrysorrhoa* all along the road verge busily feeding.

**Just in from the road were a pair of Australian Hobbies** *Falco longipennis* making sorties from perches in a large dead tree down onto the ground catching what appeared to be very large grasshoppers, which are most numerous, whilst high overhead I counted a disorderly flock of 29 Rainbow Bee-eaters *Merops ornatus* flying in a south-westerly direction. These brilliant birds nest on the property in holes in the steep sides of erosion gullies. With the masses of grasshoppers now in the area, several large flocks of Little Raven *Corvus mellori* are circulating around the district. One of these flocks was in the same paddock as the pair of Australian Hobbies, and appeared to be busily feeding on grasshoppers.

The end of a perfect evening was the sighting and observing for the best part of an hour of a family of Hooded Robins *Melanodryas cucullata*, they were perched on the boundary fence with the adult birds making sorties into the paddock to catch grasshoppers and other insects for the young bird. They were moving away from me along the boundary fence. swooping down from a post to catch prey and flying up to the next, in the manner described by Bill Graham (1990, *Canberra Bird Notes* 15: 22-27).

Despite this area being cleared during the middle of the last century there is still considerable tree cover with plenty of stumps together with standing dead trees - ideal for nesting parrots and cockatoos. There are, however, ever increasing numbers of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* competing for tree nest sites.

During the year that I have been on "Berrebangalo" I have identified over 90 species of birds on the property and adjoining area.

*Michael T. Rowe, "Berrebangalo ", Lade Vale Road, GUNNING NSW 2581*

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### **ODD OB**

### **COMMON MYNAS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF CANBERRA**

*Hazel Wright and Allan Wright*

We recently described how, in September 1988, two Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* drove a pair of Eastern Rosellas *Platycercus eximius* away from their nesting hollow in the Bibaringa paddock (Atlas Grid 50) which adjoins the Cotter Road (Wright and Wright 1991, *Canberra Bird Notes* 16: 15). This was the first time we had seen Common Mynas in this paddock.

Since then we have re-visited the paddock about a dozen times. Over this period the Common Myna has been sighted more and more regularly culminating in a sighting of a flock of 21 in May 1991. It is now unusual to visit the paddock and not see birds in the area where the horses are fed. Although we have not recorded them breeding there, this sighting provides additional evidence of the spread of this species into the countryside surrounding Canberra.

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

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### **HELP WANTED**

From time to time we need people to assist with the entering of records from our various projects into the COG Database. If you have a personal computer that runs on a DOS operating system and would like to assist please contact Malcolm Fyfe Ph 254 3310. We will provide the necessary input program and data sheets.

Many thanks,  
Projects Subcommittee

## COMPUTERS IN BIRD WATCHING

*Richard Gregory-Smith*

People interested in birds whether they are amateur bird-watchers or professional ornithologists, usually make notes of their observations. They may use field notebooks, jotting pads, scraps of paper, but at some stage, if these notes are to be of use, they need to be transcribed into a more permanent record and correlated for reference.

I have found that for general observations the use of cards is preferable to recording in books. You may wish to observe birds in a certain locality over a period, study species distribution over an area, or annual fluctuations in populations, or participate in bird-banding operations. The raw data obtained from these observations postulates reliable recording systems from which information may be extracted later.

Recording observations and data would enable you, and perhaps a bird study group to which you belong, to produce information on migration, longevity, abundance, habitat and life history of species. Adjustable and complementary systems would be required for your locality, country and life lists. This is where computers come into their own, storing information securely and accessing it in the form required. A common program should be developed at an early stage for recording by members of a group.

To many of us, mixing bird watching and computers may be an anathema. I must confess that I pretended computers did not exist until a couple of years ago, when sudden realisation of missing out on a great field of modern life (plus the present of a computer) converted me to the manifold uses of electronic data processing. I am writing this article on the computer! My advice to you, if you have not already done so, is to take the plunge and get into computing - don't be an ostrich and let this exciting adjunct pass you by.

### **COMPUTER HARDWARE**

Basically you need a personal computer (PC), a monitor, and a printer. There is an increasing number of these to choose from, and it pays to spend time comparing specifications and prices.

#### *Personal computer*

Depending upon your lifestyle and the amount of money you wish to spend, your choice of PC might be a desktop or a laptop.

Laptop computers are portable and operate from batteries or mains. The monitor is incorporated as a screen which folds flat. Laptops are designed to operate

with a built-in hard disk, or removable 5.25 inch floppy disks, or removable 3.5 inch disks. Those with built-in hard disks are more expensive and require more power than those using removable disks. However, hard disks have the greater capacity and memory.

If you plan to do your computing at home, a desktop computer provides better facilities and more programs than a laptop. There is a wide range of desktops from which to choose but I would recommend an IBM PC or a cheaper IBM-compatible clone.

### *Monitor*

Monitors should be carefully investigated to find screen size, format and colour which are acceptable to your eyes. A colour monitor is nice, but a monochrome screen is adequate and less expensive.

### *Printer*

There are several types of printers. Laser printers produce the best print-outs, but are expensive. Dot matrix printers are cheaper and produce reasonable work, especially when using near letter quality (NLQ) printing mode.

A scanner is a piece of hardware you may wish to purchase later. This scans text or pictures to incorporate them in your computer work file.

To protect your investment I would recommend purchasing a voltage controller to prevent damage to hardware and software by power surges.

## **COMPUTER SOFTWARE**

The application you have in **mind** will influence your choice of software program and, in turn, your choice of operating system and computer. Computer software programs include:

word processing,  
database management,  
spreadsheets, and  
graphics.

### *Word processing*

Word processing packages include Microsoft Word, Wordstar 2000, Framework II, and Wang to name a few. When choosing, ask for a demonstration of the program, and try it for ease of operation. It is also worth considering the compatibility of the program with other programs you intend to use.

### Database management

By using a database management program such as dBASE III or dBASE IV you can store your records where they are readily accessible and can be sorted into the order and category you require. For example a list of first sightings in a country or locality would probably include five fields:

species number (you could obtain this  
from a checklist or devise your own);  
family;  
species (common and/or scientific name);  
location; and  
date seen.

An example of such a list is shown in Figure 1. However, as you have given your records species numbers you can sort your file into species number order by giving a sort command. Figure 1 also shows the same database file sorted on species number. You will see that families are in the order of your species number. If these species numbers are in taxonomic sequence, then it follows that the order of your species will be taxonomic.

SPECNO--	FAMILY-7---	SPECIES	PLACE----	DATE----
F0005	066Columbidae	Spotted Dove	Nadi	06/14/82
F0001	019Ardeidae	Eastern Reef Egret	Navua	06/20/82
F0003	027Accipitridae	Fiji Goshawk	Korotongo	06/19/82
F0006	066Columbidae	White-throated Pigeon	Sigatoka	06/19/82
F0004	027Accipitridae	Swamp Harrier	Nakalavo	06/15/82
F0002	032Anatidae	Pacific Black Duck	Korolevu	06/19/82

SPECNO--	FAMILY	SPECIES	PLACE----	DATE----
F0001	019Ardeidae	Eastern Reef Egret	Navua	06/20/82
F0002	032Anatidae	Pacific Black Duck	Korolevu	06/19/82
F0003	027Accipitridae	Fiji Goshawk	Korotongo	06/19/82
F0004	027Accipitridae	Swamp Harrier	Nakalavo	06/15/82
F0005	066Columbidae	Spotted Dove	Nadi	06/14/82
F0006	066Columbidae	White-throated Pigeon	Sigatoka	06/19/82

**Figure 1.** Database record of sightings in Fiji: top, as entered on database; bottom, when sorted into taxonomic order.

You may wish to keep a life list or world list of your sightings. This can be achieved by merging your country or locality lists, and then deleting duplicated sightings of a later date. Care must be taken at an early stage, however, to ensure

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MONTHLY MAXIMA

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV
1986	8	10	7		88	103	141	67	40	17	18
1987		10	10	10	72	112	80	58	27	19	12
1988	12	24	25	33	60	80	63	50	30	14	30
TOTAL	20	44	42	43	220	295	284	175	97	50	60
MEAN	10	15	14	22	73	98	95	58	32	17	20

Figure 2 Spreadsheet of White-headed Stilt records over three years

WHITE-HEADED STILT : MOITAKA SETTLING PONDS 1986/87  
 MONTHLY MAXIMA

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
1986	8	10	7		88	103	141	67	40	17	18	14
1987		10	10	10	72	112	80	58	27	19	12	14
1988	12	24	25	33	60	80	63	50	30	14	30	22
TOTAL	20	44	42	43	220	295	284	175	97	50	60	50
MEAN	10	15	14	22	73	98	95	58	32	17	20	17

Figure 2. Spreadsheet of White-headed Stilt records over three years.

Always make sure you back up your work in case of hard disk failure. The removable disks on which you backup should be kept in a safe and separate environment to the computer and away from electric and magnetic fields. It is also important to save your work regularly as a sudden power failure can result in lost hours if your work has not been saved.

Computer viruses are becoming widespread and care should be taken when using disks from an outside source that they are checked. A virus can quickly spread and destroy programs and files from hard or removable disks.

The use of computers and appropriate programs increases the value and enjoyment of bird watching by facilitating recording and disseminating your acquired information.

WHITE-HEADED STILT 1986/88  
MOITAKA SETTLING PONDS

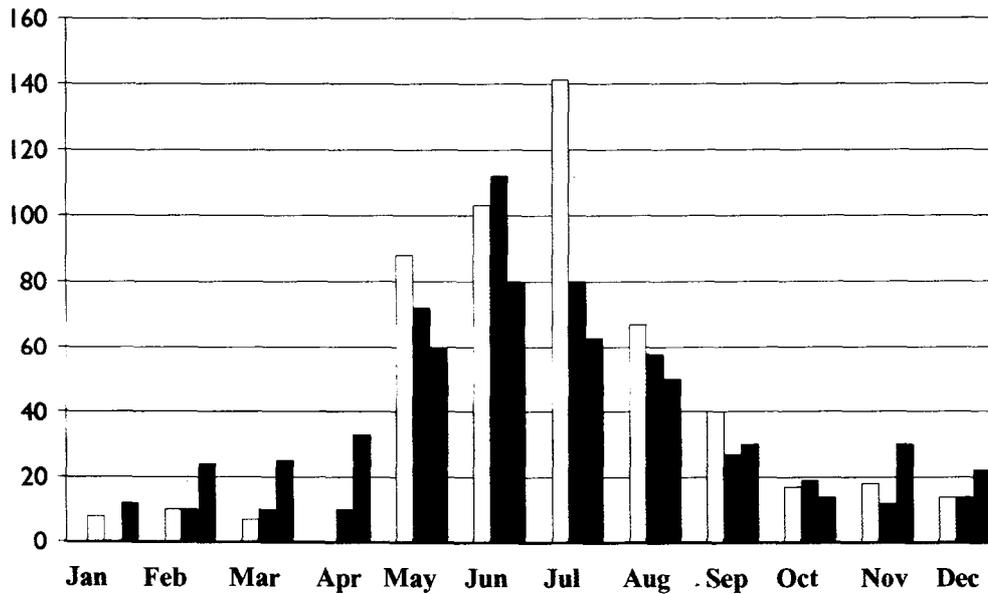


Figure 3. Graph of White-headed Stilt records over three years.

*Richard Gregory-Smith, School of Language and Scientific Thinking, Universiti  
Utara Malaysia, Sintok 06010, JITRA KEDAH, MALAYSIA*

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## OUT AND ABOUT

*G. Tibicen*

Bird watchers are often faced with people asking them to help with an injured bird. The answer is to tell them about the Wildlife Foundation (ACT) - an organisation of trained volunteers who can help with sick, injured, or orphaned wildlife. If you want help they can be contacted on their 24-hour answering service, telephone 285 6171. Their address, if you want more details, is PO Box 207, Jamison, ACT 2614.

Amateur bird watchers often ask what they can do to help ornithology. One of the simplest answers is to publish their observations. Most bird watchers think the only observations worth publishing are those of rare birds occurring far away from their normal range. Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, there is a great lack of published information about the effects that introduced species have on native species in Canberra. Everybody apparently "knows for a fact" that Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* displace native birds from nest holes. However, few people have seen them do it in Canberra, or at least have bothered to record the fact. (But see the "Odd Ob" by Hazel and Allan Wright in this issue! Eds) Whilst looking for material for "Out and About" I came across a paper that provides information about the effects that Common Starlings have on native birds in Nevada, USA. It was published in the American journal *Condor* and a précis is provided below.

Since 1978, Norman H. Weitzel has lived on a 0.35 ha property near Reno, Nevada, USA. The previous owner, who was born on the property in 1900, had never seen Common Starlings there.

In 1978, 14 pairs of native birds of 10 species nested in two Cottonwood Trees on the edge of the property 7 nine in cavities and five in open nests. In March of the same year, five solitary starlings and two flocks of seven starlings each, entered the cottonwoods and remained in the vicinity for three days.

In late February 1979, a flock of five starlings flew into the cottonwoods and two pairs from this flock began nesting activities in cavities. By mid-March the number of nesting pairs of starlings had increased to eight. During the next two months eight species of native birds attempted to nest in the cottonwoods but were displaced by the harassment and aggressive behaviour of the starlings.

No native birds nested in the cottonwoods during the five years 1979 through to 1983 despite attempts to do so. During this period, the number of pairs of starlings nesting in the cottonwoods increased from eight to 12.

In February 1984, Mr Weitzel began a systematic extermination of the starling population with a 20-gauge shotgun. The shooting continued through to September 1987.

In 1984, eight pairs of six species of native birds resumed nesting in the cottonwoods and by 1987 this figure had risen to a total of 17 pairs of 11 species. No starlings nested in the cottonwoods during this period.

Weitzel, N.H. (1988). Nest-site competition between the European Starling and native breeding birds in north-western Nevada. *Condor* 90: 515-517.

Please, if you have any personal observations that can increase our documented knowledge of the effects of introduced species on native birds in the Canberra region, send them to the editors of *Canberra Bird Notes*, I feel sure they would be pleased to receive them. If we are to convince the administrators and public that introduced species pose a threat to native species, then we must provide documented evidence. Few administrators and members of the public share our interest in, and concern for, native birds. Indeed, it is possible that they may even look upon Common Mynas, Common Starlings, and other introduced species as bright cheerful chatty birds that are an asset to the man-made environment. If they do hold these views, they are unlikely to have them changed by hearsay evidence. Providing documented observations on the effects of introduced species on native species is one way even the tyro can help to increase ornithological knowledge, and through this, assist in the conservation of our native birds. (We endorse G. Tibicen's views and would welcome such observations. If you feel unable to write them down please telephone one of us, or speak to us at a meeting. Eds)

The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) newsletter was renamed *Wingspan* earlier this year. It is the more populist organ of the RAOU complementing their scientific publication *The Emu* with a more chatty informal style covering items of general interest to the amateur bird watcher. At the same time as the renaming, colour has been introduced to the 20-page newsletter. If you are interested in further details of *Wingspan* and the RAOU, these can be obtained from their headquarters at 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039. Membership is \$35 per annum, plus an extra \$29 if you want the *Emu* as well.

One of the more "good news" items in a recent issue of *Wingspan* was news that the three-year project investigating the status of the Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus* has been completed and the project found that the species is not endangered. Instead it has been reclassified as vulnerable and the number of breeding pairs Australia-wide estimated at about 350.

An interesting fact stated in a recent issue of *Wingspan* was that the World Wildlife Fund has called for a tourist boycott of Thailand in view of that country's total disregard for wildlife conservation and particular their thriving legal import/export trade in endangered species. The point was raised in a letter written by P.C.

Dearie who went on to say that the effective extinction of Spix's Macaw *Cyanopsitta spixii* and the threatened extinction of the Thick-billed Parrot *Rhynchopsitta pachyrhyncha* is an indication of what the pet trade can do. In the same issue the RAOU was advertising a 22-day trip to (guess where?) Thailand, despite the call for a boycott. Is this a case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing? Or is it a case of some bird watchers being interested only in their personal desires and ignoring the common good? Perhaps the RAOU should rethink its support of the trip?

In the last "Out and About" I listed a number of bird-bath regulations sent in by a reader. This encourages me to reinforce the point that the best way of attracting native birds to suburban gardens is by providing them with water and native plants, rather than by artificial feeding. As an example of what can be achieved, a reader sent me the following list of birds that were seen during a 5-minute period at a bird-bath in a Canberra garden. The time was 2 p.m. and the date was 6 May 1991:

2 immature Golden Whistlers  
1 female Rose Robin  
1 Brown Thornbill  
1 Yellow Thornbill  
2 Striated Thornbills 1  
Fuscous Honeyeater 1  
White-plumed Honeyeater  
1 Eastern Spinebill  
c10 Silvereyes

Can any reader provide a more interesting or numerous list in a 57 minute period at a bird-bath? There is an mystery prize for anybody that can. Remember that the bath should be positioned where cats cannot ambush the birds.

1. -

#### RARITIES PANEL NEWS

In January and February the conditions at Kelly's Swamp were obviously just right for crakes and rails. From mid-January to early March there were a series of records of Lewin's Rail *Rallus pectoralis*, Spotless Crake *Porzana tabuensis*, Baillon's Crake *P. pusilla*, and Australian Crake *P. fluminea*. Included was an interesting and rare breeding record of two juvenile Lewin's Rail at Kelly's Swamp.

Other interesting waterbird records were sightings of three Grey Plovers *Pluvialis squatarola* and a Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* at Lake Bathurst, and two Common Sandpipers *Tringa hypoleucos* at Isabella Ponds, Tuggeranong.

Three Glossy Black-Cockatoos *Calyptorhynchus lathami* were sighted at Urila, near Queanbeyan on 2 June. It is possible that they may still be around as they turn up occasionally in our area and stay for some months feeding mainly in casuarinas. If you are near casuarinas it may be worth a look, the birds can be very quiet when feeding.

There were a couple of interesting records from the eastern edge of our area, some Chestnut-rumped Hylacolas *Sericornis pyrrhopygius* near the Big Hole in March and April, and a Pink Robin *Petroica rodinogaster* near Majors Creek.

A dark-phase White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis* was reported at Rivett in April - another autumn record.

Finally, the Black Falcon *Falco subniger* is the first record for some time from Lake George, an area that used to be one of the strongholds for this species in our area.

### RARITIES PANEL ENDORSED LIST NO 29

#### Category 3

##### Glossy Ibis

1; 12-14 Jan 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp

##### Whistling Kite

2; 4 Jun 90; B. Lepschi; near Uriarra Crossing

1; 12 May 91; P. Veerman; south end Lake George

##### Grey Goshawk

1 (white phase); 20 Jan 91; M. Taylor, Mt. Gingera

##### White-bellied Sea-Eagle

1; 28 Sep 90; M. Fyfe; near Coppin's Crossing

2; 12 May 91; P. Veerman; south end Lake George

1; 16 Jun 91; J. Nicholls; Sullivans Creek, ANU 1; 30

Jun 91; J. McIlroy; Murrumbidgee R., west of Hall

##### Black Falcon

1; 2 Jun 91; B. Lepschi; north end Lake George

##### Brown Quail

2; 15 Apr 90; B. Lepschi; near Rye Park

##### Lewin's Rail

1; 1 & 8 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp

3 & 2 juv; 10 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp

2; 17 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp

1; 18 Feb 91; M. Taylor; Kelly's Swamp

##### Spotless Crake

up to 5; 31 Jan - 17 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp

1; 14 Feb 91; M. Taylor; Kelly's Swamp

1; 16 Feb 91; J. Bissett; Kelly's Swamp

1; 9 Mar 91; B. Lindenmayer; Kelly's Swamp

Grey Plover  
3; 14 Dec 90; R. Thomas; Lake Bathurst

Common Sandpiper  
2; 24 Feb 91; S. Chittick; Isabella Ponds, Tuggeranong

Gull-billed Tern  
1; 24 Nov 90; R. Thomas; Lake Bathurst

Diamond Dove  
1; 22 Feb 91; A. Morrison; south of Bredbo

Glossy Black-Cockatoo  
3; 2 Jun 91; R. McKay; Urila near Queanbeyan

Singing Bushlark  
1; 24 Feb 91; S. Chittick; Lake Tuggeranong

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike  
1 (dark phase); 3 Apr 91; J. Holland; Rivett

Pink Robin  
1; 28 Apr 91; B. Lindenmayer; near Majors Creek

Chestnut-rumped Hylacola  
3; 3 Mar 91; N. Luff; Big Hole  
1; 20 & 21 Apr 91; N. Luff; Big Hole

Regent Honeyeater  
1; 12 Apr 91; M. Dow; Ainslie

## **Category 2**

### **Baillon's Crake**

**1; 13 Jan & 2 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp**

### **Australian Crake**

**up to 6; 13 Jan - 17 Feb 91; R. Thomas; Kelly's Swamp**

### Rose Robin

1; 27 Apr 91; I. Baird; O'Connor

## **Possible Escapees**

### Rainbow Lorikeet

3; 27 May 90; R. Kennemore; Aranda

3; 16 Jun 90; K. Hahne; Aranda

1; 2 - 6 Jun 91; B. Daly; Cook

## **Escapee**

### Budgerigar

1; 22 Jun 91; J. Nicholls; Deakin

*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.

**Annual Subscriptions** for 1991 are: Student (18 years of age and younger) \$8.50; Individual \$17.00; Family \$20.00; Institutions \$20.00. All receive one copy of *Canberra Bird Notes*.

**FOR SALE**

**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.

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

**FOR SALE**

**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 c/o David Purchase, 5 Orchard Place, Melba, ACT 2615 (Tel 258 2252).

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