



Canberra bird notes

Volume 3 Number 7 July 1976

EDITORIAL

At the April meeting of C.O.G. Dr H.J. Frith spoke of his recent research work on Australian pigeons and his talk was most interesting.

At the conclusion of the evening several questions were asked, which if they had been pursued to their logical conclusion would have gone on for many hours.

An informal meeting of the Committee held immediately afterwards decided that at the first available opportunity a symposium should be held on the general question of 'Our birds in the year 2000'; in other words the plan is to discuss all aspects of the conservation of our avifauna including the matter of scientific collecting which was the subject of the April questions.

Several members have been asked to participate in this discussion and the first date that all those interested will be available will be the October meeting. This will be an interesting, informative and educational occasion. Don't miss it.

WILLIE WAGTAIL - NOMAD OR MIGRANT?

Merle Baldwin

G. Tibicen has pointed out that the Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys* may be a partial migrant in the Canberra area (CBN 3 5 p. 17). Slater (1974) is definite: 'Some regular movements from south eastern Australia in winter'. Macdonald (1973) is more cautious, regarding the wagtail as 'solitary; sedentary and nomadic, especially where there are wet seasons, some regular seasonal movements'.

Macdonald's statement, which at first appears rather contradictory, applies equally well to wagtails in the Inverell district where I have made notes for fourteen consecutive years on this and other species (Baldwin 1975)

My study of the ecological niche occupied by the wagtail seems to rule out partial migration but there is nomadism in autumn. In winter the birds are solitary each in its own territory but, come spring, one bird - is it the male? - moves away for several days and returns with a partner. A note describing this behaviour was made at Gwydir Park on 2 September 1965.

'Our wagtail which had been absent about a week ... came back to the garden ... pecked a few crumbs then crouched motionless as the dark closed in.' (This bird appeared exhausted, I assume from running the gauntlet of occupied territories.) 'Next morning two wagtails were hunting for a nest site.'

Spring absences of several days and returns with partner were noted four times; birds in adjoining territories mated three times; in other years a passing stranger was accepted or a brief absence of a few hours furnished a mate. The newcomer remained on the boundary of the territory until the owner's natural aggression was overcome by the former's submissive juvenile behaviour.

At Gilgai, where there are two houses in one corner of an eight hectare block, each garden has its solitary wagtail tenant throughout the colder months, but in spring there is, in contiguous territory, aggression which changes to courtship. Nesting takes place in one territory; fledglings benefit from the food in both.

In late February-March small flocks (fourteen was the largest noted) gather and may stay for a week in one territory before moving on. Aggression is typical of these gatherings - chasing, pecking and grinding out of shrill phrases which sound more like 'dirty cheat' than the dulcet 'pretty sweet' of moonlit nights!

Resident wagtails are in post-breeding moult at this time, and after a fracas are sadly dilapidated. When the visitors have gone only one bird may remain, its partner having returned to its own territory. Should the resident pair stay, increasing aggression soon results in the departure of one. During this period young of the year leave too.

It therefore seems that the nomadic flocks of autumn are not birds on partial migration but rather fortuitous gatherings of young of the year plus adults temporarily without territory. During the winter peregrinations nearly all seem to find and settle in vacant territories, as only one or two wagtails, obviously in search of territory, have been noted in spring. A pair of strangers took over part of the holding of parents too busily concerned with the feeding of nestlings to police all their boundaries.

This summary of my notes shows that the Willie Wagtail is solitary in the post-breeding period; that adults with territory are sedentary; that young and some adults are nomadic in autumn - as stated by Macdonald. I have no records which show that nomadism increases in wet seasons but suspect that more young would be raised then with a consequent rise in the number of autumn nomads. There is little to indicate that migration occurs.

I regard nomadism in the wagtail as a convenient way of dispersing young and consider that the autumn search for territory is important to the survival of the species, even more so than the concomitant search for food.

REFERENCES

Baldwin, M. (1975) *Emu* 75:113-20.

Macdonald, J.B. (1973) *Birds of Australia* (A.H. & A.W. Reed, Sydney).

Slater, Peter (1974) *A Field Guide to Australian Birds, Passerines* (Rigby Limited).

Mrs M. Baldwin, Gilgai, via Inverell, N.S.W. 2360.

THE NANKEEN KESTREL STUDY GROUP

Darryl Smedley

A group has been formed to study the Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*. The main emphasis will be on plumage study and life history.

Briefly the objectives are to:

- (i) co-ordinate study of this species;
- (ii) collect and co-ordinate data from field work and literature; (iii) ascertain the details of the plumage progression and relate this to age and sex;
- (iv) carry out behavioural observations of kestrels;
- (v) carry out area studies on kestrel populations.

To date an examination of museum skins (about 160 skins) has revealed the following plumage data, based on an examination of specimens October 1975. Classifications based on that used for the European Kestrel, *Falco tinnuceulus*.

MALES: Wingspan below 760 mm

Juvenile & first summer: Back and wing-coverts very heavily marked; tail rufous heavily barred; tail-coverts brown, may be barred; cere orbit and legs blue/grey turning pale yellow; head rufous.

First winter: Some body moult giving distinctly less marking on the back and wing-coverts; tail brown still fully barred though may be slightly less defined due to feather wear; tail-coverts grey; cere orbit and legs yellow; head rufous.

Second summer: Back less marking than previous category; tail moulting into grey retains some degree of barring; head rufous

Second winter: Back and wing-coverts lost nearly all marking; tail grey with barring disappearing, centre two becoming unbarred first (may have rufous edging to feathers); head rufous to grey/rufous.

Third summer: Back and wing-coverts very little to no markings; tail lost all or nearly all barring; head variable as in second winter. The head will eventually become fully grey.

FEMALES: Wingspan above 770 mm

Juvenile & first summer: Identical to male in this category.

First winter: Back and wing-covert markings not as heavy as juvenile; tail heavily barred though may be slightly less defined due to feather wear, tail-coverts rufous; cere orbit and legs yellow.

Second summer: Marking on back and wing-coverts slightly reduced, tail still fully barred. Has been found to breed., in this plumage.

Second winter: Back and wing-coverts as for second summer;

tail now distinctly less barred, i.e. the barring is fainter and often only present on the inner vane of feather.

Third summer: Back and wing-covert markings reduced to moderate; tail even less barring than second winter with the mid two feathers often unbarred.

Third winter: Back and wing-coverts same as for third summer; tail very little to no barring; tail and tail-coverts may show grey tinges.

These data need confirmation and extension in the field, preferably with banded, known age specimens.

Those interested in co-operating in this study by banding this species or providing breeding data should contact the author.

Mr D. Smedley, 4 Trevone Street, Padstow, N.S.W. 2211.

A NOTE ON THE NAMING OF BIRDS

Jon Prance

There are several reasons for the use of scientific names when describing birds. Two obvious ones are to identify the bird precisely and internationally, and to show the relationships between species. Another purpose is to describe the bird itself, to indicate a striking feature or habit, and sometimes to name its discoverer. In this sense the rather forbidding scientific terms may on translation represent a perfect verbal miniature of the subject, a delightful vignette both pleasing and instructive to the birdwatcher. These little word-portraits range from the literal and personal to the comic and at times quite beautiful.

A case of the literal is *Meliphaga cassidix* which is exactly the 'helmeted honeyeater'. A personal element is seen in *Corvus bennetti*, 'Bennett's Crow', or the Little Crow as it is usually called. Comic scientific descriptions are perhaps *Acridotheres tristis*, literally 'the mournful hunter of locusts', or Indian Myna, and the curiously named *Gymnorhina tibicen*, 'the bald-nosed flute player', who turns out to be the familiar Black-backed Magpie. An example of the beautiful, and strange, can be seen in the Fantailed Cuckoo, *Cacomantis pyrrhophanus*, which means 'the fire-coloured prophet of doom'; but my favourite among poetical word-pictures is the Little Wattle-bird's lengthy title *Anthochaera chrysoptera*, in English 'the golden-winged rejoicer in flowers'.

This rewarding ornithological sideline may be pursued at will with the aid of Neville Cayley's book *What bird is that?* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1931 and later editions), one of its pleasant features being that etymologies are supplied for the scientific names of all native Australian birds.

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BACK NUMBERS OF CANBERRA BIRD NOTES

Over recent months endeavours have been made to assemble stocks of back numbers of our journal in one place. This is now done and stocks are held by the Editor and are for

sale at 25c per copy. At this stage we have at least a few copies of every issue.

STATUS OF BIRDS OF CANBERRA AND DISTRICT
(continued from vol. 3 no. 6)

STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris*

Breeding resident. A highly successful introduced species, common in both rural and urban areas. Feeds on the ground often in small groups and in large flocks during the colder months. Breeding from September to December.

INDIAN MYNA *Acridotheres tristis*

Presumed breeding resident. The deliberate introduction of this species to Canberra by a private citizen, though well intentioned, was misguided and is to be deplored. The founding population is centred in the Griffith-Manuka area, but single birds and pairs have been observed in many outlying suburbs in the past two years.

OLIVE-BACKED ORIOLE *Oriolus sagittatus*

Breeding summer migrant. Although not very numerous in our area it can usually be found in open woodland during the period from September to April (with a few records in May). In some years it appears more numerous than in others. Breeding records from November to January.

MAGPIE-LARK *Grallina cyanoleuca*

Breeding resident. Very numerous throughout the area, with breeding being recorded from September to April. This species is subject to flocking in winter, when flocks may be seen in the more open areas of Canberra, especially around the Lake.

WHITE-WINGED CHOUGH *Corcorax melanorhamphus*

Breeding resident. Found throughout our area in open forest and woodland including pine forests. Breeding records from September to February. In winter the flocks move over larger 'home' areas and can be more easily noticed around suburban Canberra.

APOSTLE BIRD *Struthidea cinerea*

Vagrant. A single observation of eight birds in 1948 (no other information) is mentioned in Birds in the Australian High Country.

DUSKY WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus cyanopterus*

Breeding migrant. Fairly numerous in our area, being found in savannah woodland from October to the beginning of April. A few birds arrive in August and some stay until May. Rowley in Frith (1969) states that some birds remain over winter. Breeding records are from October to January.

WHITE-BROWED WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus superciliosus*

Breeding migrant/nomad. There are usually a very small number of birds in our area in the period October to January. It tends to prefer more open areas than the Dusky Wood-swallow and breeds from October to December. In some years there is an enormous increase in numbers and the bird becomes extremely common in our area.

MASKED WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus personatus*

Status uncertain. Occurs in mixed flocks with the preceding species (White-browed Wood-swallow) but in our area in much smaller numbers and quite often flocks consist only of the White-browed. Definite records of the species and of the composition of the mixed flocks would be very useful.

BLACK-FACED WOOD-SWALLOW *Artamus cinereus*

Although mentioned in Birds in the Australian High Country, no definite record of this species in our area has been found.

PIED CURRAWONG *Strepera graculina*

Very numerous throughout our area. It breeds in open and closed forest during the period November to January, even breeding in Canberra itself. During the winter large flocks appear around Canberra but the movement of these

flocks is still not fully understood, although they are believed to be nomadic with flock composition changing constantly.

GREY CURRAWONG *Strepera versicolor*

Breeding resident (?). Although nowhere as common as the Pied Currawong it is still widely though thinly spread throughout our area, especially in the more open forests. Winter movements are still not fully understood but it is believed to be fairly sedentary in our area, moving only into more open areas to forage.

PIED BUTCHER-BIRD *Cracticus nigrogularis*

Vagrant. Isolated records of single birds in March 1966, February 1967 and April 1969 and two birds in October 1968.

GREY BUTCHER BIRD *Cracticus torquatus*

Breeding resident (?). Thinly distributed throughout our area, usually in open forest although sometimes it does occur in more closed forest. Nowhere numerous and in our area at least it tends to stay away from human habitation. Definite breeding records would be appreciated, as would regular records in the one area.

BLACK-BACKED MAGPIE *Gymnorhina tibicen*

Breeding resident. Numerous throughout our area in all habitats except in tall closed forest. Breeds from July to November. In the Canberra area all plumage forms of the bird occur from pure white back to pure black back with assorted variants in between. However the black-backed form is by far the most numerous.

AUSTRALIAN RAVEN *Corvus coronoides*

Breeding resident. Found in all habitats throughout our area. Breeds from July to the end of December.

LITTLE RAVEN *Corvus mellori*

Breeding partial migrant. Returns to fixed areas to breed in loose colonies (usually in open forest) and then disperses from our area to more open grassland to forage. Breeds in November. It is present in medium numbers from then until the end of June, by which time few birds are seen until they return to breed again in November.

SATIN BOWER-BIRD *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*

Moderately common in our area in tall forests especially in the wetter parts. Confirmed breeding records are required. In the winter flocks form and these move into more open forests (e.g. Tidbinbilla) at the edge of the range country. The only records in Canberra itself have been at Yarralumla nursery.

POINT HUT OUTING

Steve Wilson

Sunday 18 April dawned beautifully fine and clear and the weather was perfect as we left for Point Hut Crossing to see the migration of Yellow-faced and White-naped Honeyeaters, but as we moved south large black clouds rolled in from the south-west. On arrival at the Crossing it was raining quite steadily. The rain eased but apart from a brief period the morning remained overcast.

The migration habits of these birds are little understood. We do know that over many years up to twenty thousand birds have been seen flying south past Pine Island and Point Hut Crossing between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. But where do these birds roost before this flight? What factors trigger the migration? We do know from previous experience that the migration does not take place during unsuitable weather conditions and so it proved on this day. Some of the party returned on Monday 19) when the weather seemed more suitable but again - no migration. The following Sunday (27 April) small flocks flew south past Point Hut Crossing.

The outing on 18 April was not entirely unsuccessful; one mist net was strung up (under permit) to demonstrate the catching techniques if the flocks passed. Male and female White-browed Scrubwrens were netted and differences debated before their release. Male Scarlet and Flame Robins were seen and a Darter flew north along the river.

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FURTHER DETAILS OF THREE RARE SPECIES
IN THE A.C.T. LIST

Steve Wilson

The series 'Status of birds of Canberra and district' is nearing completion and the intention is to present details of known information on each species and to focus attention on those whose inclusion depends on occasional sightings etc. It has always been hoped that the publication of the 'Status' notes would provoke discussion and draw information from our members.

The present appears to be an appropriate moment to provide more detailed information regarding three birds the inclusion of which in the A.C.T. list depends on single records which have not been published previously in full detail.

CHESTNUT-RUMPED THORNBILL *Acanthiza uropygialis*

This species was added to the list by Lamm et al. (1963). The circumstances were that on 14 February 1961, while bird watching on the hills in the area between the developed area of the suburb of Campbell and the area where the Defence Offices now stand at Russell Hill, a strange species was sighted. On that occasion and on three subsequent trips the Wilson boys, Brendan and Denis, were also present.

Realising that it was a strange species for the A.C.T. a further try was made at identification on the following two days (15 and 16 February 1961). Mist nets were erected on both days in the area where the birds were seen on the first occasion; the area at that time had many large plants of the introduced boxthorn among widely spaced eucalypts. The nets in use at that time were 1½ inch mesh made from nylon, nets which proved incapable of holding most of our smaller species. A group of four of the strange species was sighted at quite close range on both days and they were identified as the Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, a bird with which the three observers were familiar from trips to the Riverina district.

Many attempts were made over several hours on each day to flush the birds from the bushes into the nets and individuals hit on several occasions. The mesh was too

large and the birds escaped through the nets.

As work on the illustrations for Birds in the Australian High Country was then well advanced, a request had been made for a specimen to be collected which would be lodged with the Museum, CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research. As the two netting efforts had failed to catch one of the birds, a further collecting attempt was made on 17 February 1961, this time with a 45-bore, dust shot, hand gun; but by then the four birds had disappeared.

This species is somewhat nomadic and is very common as one reaches the flatter country of the inland not far to the west. There are no other A.C.T. records and it would be interesting to know how close to our area it has been seen by other observers. Species such as this could be sighted here at any time but especially in drought years; but 1961 was not a drought year.

It is interesting to note that personal notes for 1961 indicate that twenty-two species were added to the list in that year by local observers.

CRIMSON CHAT *Epthianura tricolor* and YELLOW-THROATED MINER *Manorina flavigula*

The Second Annual Bird Report 1965-66 A.C.T. Branch RAOU (which later became C.O.G.) included the first published reports of these two species. The writer was approached in 1965 to provide some of the text for Birds in the Australian High Country. That project was fairly well publicised at the time and in response to an appeal for information on rare and unusual species, a 'schoolboy' collection of about 200 bird's eggs was provided. Most were obviously the eggs of well-known species but the collector drew attention to two clutches which he regarded as unusual; he knew the local birds quite well but had been unable to identify the species which laid these two clutches.

The eggs were shown to several ornithologists at CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research without positive identification. Finally they were sent to the Australian Museum, Sydney, where the Curator of Birds, Mr H.J. de S.

Disney, compared the eggs with those in the museum collection and identified them as those of the Crimson Chat and of the Yellow-throated Miner.

Again these were inland species beyond their normal breeding range. The Crimson Chat tends to appear in new areas and it is possible that it could reach the A.C.T., especially in a drought year. The eggs of both species were collected in 1957, a drought year in the N.S.W. inland and in our area. The Yellow-throated Miner is commonly regarded as being fairly sedentary and its appearance here is unexpected. Both clutches were collected in the paddock north of the Fyshwick to Queanbeyan road opposite HMAS Harman and near the Abattoir.

There are no other local records and again it would be interesting to know where these two species have been seen elsewhere near the A.C.T.

The three records are regarded as accidental occurrences but it must be stressed that many species found to the west of our area have a tendency to become highly nomadic especially in drought years.

Reference

Lamm, D.W., Wilson, S.J. and Belton, W. 'New information on birds of the Australian Capital Territory', *The Emu* 1963, vol. 63, Part 1, pp. 57-65.

S.J. Wilson, 2 Scott Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

A MULTIPLE SIGHTING OF GREAT CRESTED GREBES

Doug Ross

In recent months I have tended to neglect the stretch of water where Jerrabomberra Creek enters the lake - developments at the Causeway tip have made observing something of a scramble - but a chance visit in mid afternoon on 16 May 1976 proved very worthwhile. In cold, blustery, damp weather, four Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* were feeding, two just on the lake and two about 100 metres up the creek. The creek birds soon moved out of sight round a bend but the lake birds were in full view, often within 25 metres, for the half hour I was there.

These birds were not in breeding plumage but whether the reduced crests were indicative of juveniles or of non-breeding adults I am not sufficiently familiar with the bird to be able to say.

A.D. Ross, 64 Sprent Street, Narrabundah, A.C.T. 2604.

OUT AND ABOUT

G. Tibicen

One of the important functions of regional bird groups such as our own is to collect and publish information on the occurrence and numbers of birds within its own locality. The Bird Observers Association of Tasmania have always understood this and have assisted the Tasmanian Field Naturalists Club to produce a special edition of the *Tasmanian Naturalist* (no. 44) which contains only articles on birds of the west coast of Tasmania - an area little understood ornithologically. Most of the parts covered are under threat of development and journals like this will help to provide ammunition for the next battle against the Hydro-Electric Commission. If you care about such things why not show the Tasmanians that they are not alone by sending 70 cents to the Tas. Field Naturalists Club, G.P.O. Box 68A, Hobart, Tas. 7001, for a copy of the journal. You will learn about the birds of Western Tasmania and they will learn that they are not alone and that other people care what happens in 'the small island'.

The following is reprinted from the *Age* of 26 October 1975 (via the *Bird Observer*).

TIENTSIN, October 1975. A British ornithologist has discovered an 'extinct' stork alive and well in a small zoo here.

The eastern white stork - the Asian relative of the bird that nests on the chimney pots of Europe - had not been seen for years and experts thought it had died out.

Rumours that an eastern stork was in Tientsin Zoo reached Smithsonian Museum in Washington, U.S.A. It asked British diplomat John Gerson, a keen ornithologist, to check. Mr Gerson found the stork wandering among the cranes and pelicans in the zoo's bird house.

Chinese officials told him that the stork still

nested in small numbers in north-east China, migrating south each year.

'Western ornithologists have little recent knowledge about bird

life in China, but obviously the stork is threatened with extinction still', Mr Gerson said.

One of the perils of being interested in birds is the fact that one can easily be misunderstood through no fault of one's own. For instance:

A daughter of a local ornithologist attends a pre-school which shall be nameless. One day a dead bird was found outside by some children and brought in to the pre-school. The teacher, remembering her training days, thought it would be a good idea to hold a funeral for the bird which would help to get across the concept of death to the pre-schoolers. However when she announced this to the class, aforementioned daughter brightly pipes up: 'Oh no, you should not bury birds. Mummy always puts them in the fridge for Daddy ' .

I think the ornithologist in question is still trying to convince the pre-school teacher that he does not have unusual feeding habits!

Remember if you find any dead birds which are in good condition - don't throw them away! Dead birds can be very useful in the preparation of skins and skeletons for museum use. If you find a corpse (apart from Magpies) ring Dick Schodde (81 3732), Steve Wilson (95 7128) or Grahame Clark (54 1279) and they will arrange for it to be collected. If you live outside Canberra put the corpse in a plastic bag, wrap that in newspaper and send it to the Museum, P.O. Box 82, Lyneham, A.C.T. 2602.

The International Council for the Preservation of Birds has established a World Working Group on Parrots under the chairmanship of Dr W.G. Conway, Director of the New York Zoological Society. The Group will be a small, very active assemblage of dedicated persons vitally interested in conservation aspects as they affect parrots. The membership will be world-wide and most of the workload will be handled by correspondence. The present secretary is Joe Forshaw and any interested members can contact him on 51 1821 for further details of the Group.

All bird watchers seem to love bird books. Canberra Bird Notes does not carry advertising but we would be remiss if we did not draw attention to the bird book bargains available at Mary Martin's Bookshop in Canberra House, Alinga Street, Canberra City (at the east end). The writer has bought six bird books there in recent weeks, all at less than half the published price and all important ornithological works.

OUTING 14 MARCH 1976

Barry Baker

About twenty members and friends attended the outing to Nanima, N.S.W., a grazing property just north of the A.C.T. which contains a hundred-acre area of dry sclerophyll habitat. The party reached their destination by 8.30 a.m. Although the weather was excellent for birding (warm and overcast skies), few species were observed initially. However, good views were obtained of Wedge-tailed Eagle, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Scarlet Robin and Brown Treecreeper, and a few people caught a fleeting glimpse of a pair of Western Warblers.

On the journey back to the Barton Highway, the party stopped at a large dam where many waterbirds were seen, including Crested Grebe, Mountain Duck, Blue-winged Shoveler and Musk Duck.

It was an excellent outing and a total of 57 species were observed on the day, the others being Black Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Grebe, White-necked Heron, White Ibis, Black Swan, Black Duck, Grey Teal, Wood Duck, Black-shouldered Kite, Brown Goshawk, Nankeen Kestrel, Brown Falcon, Dusky Moorhen, Eastern Swamphen, Coot, Masked Plover, Black-fronted Dotterel, Silver Gull, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Galah, Crimson Rosella, Eastern Rosella, Red-rumped Parrot, Kookaburra, Richards Pipit, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, Weebill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Scarlet Robin, Eastern Yellow Robin, Grey Fantail, Willie Wagtail, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-throated Treecreeper, Spotted Pardalote, Striated Pardalote, Brown-headed Honeyeater, Noisy Friarbird, Noisy Miner, Red Wattlebird, Australian Magpie Lark, Pied Currawong, Grey Currawong, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven.

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THE ATLAS OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS
PRINCIPLES AND PROGRAMME

(The following is an RAOU circular reprinted for the information of those who are not members of that body.)

PRINCIPLES

(1) *Scope*

The RAOU's aim is to prepare and publish an atlas of Australian birds. The results of two pilot atlas projects, one in New South Wales and one in South Australia, show that while an atlas of breeding distribution is desirable, under Australian conditions it is an ideal not yet attainable, so the atlas will be of total distribution with as much information about breeding distribution as can be obtained.

(2) *Administration*

The atlas will be co-ordinated by the Field Investigation Committee of the RAOU from its office in the Union's headquarters in Melbourne. It will eventually be administered by a full-time Organiser and supporting staff, who will be appointed as funds become available. Initially liaison will be between the Union's assistant to the secretary and eight voluntary regional organisers, one in each State and the Northern Territory, with two in New South Wales, one for the inland and one for the coast. These organisers will also be responsible for the accuracy of identifications.

(3) *Data handling*

The data will be collected in accordance with the core data requirements of the Australian Biological Resources Survey Interim Council. Field data will be entered on a species list written in the vernacular and covering the whole of mainland Australia and Tasmania. Data from these cards will be transferred to core data sheets and it is proposed to feed them into a data bank of the ABRASIC where they can be stored on magnetic tape.

(4) *Ownership of data*

Government financial support will be essential for the implementation of a full atlas project and government participation will mean that the government must be offered a share in access to and use of the stored data, as is the normal practice among scientific collaborators. In terms of the ABRASIC data bank this means unrestricted recall of the data with acknowledgment if published.

(5) *Grid*

The atlas will use the universal latitude and longitude grid which most other ABRASIC collaborators are using. Comparison with other mapping scheme results, e.g. vegetation, will then be possible.

(6) *Collaborating groups*

The RAOU will collaborate fully with other amateur ornithological societies in Australia to ensure that the largest possible number of field observers will participate.

PROGRAMME

The RAOU Pilot Atlas Scheme has completed its field work. The South Australian Ornithological Association's Pilot Atlas Scheme has a year to run. The RAOU Atlas of Australian Birds Scheme will start in September 1975 by gathering historical data. The programme will be as follows.

To June 1976

(1) The setting up of an administrative headquarters in Melbourne and the establishment of a network of regional atlas organisers.

(2) The conversion into core data on a degree square grid of the manuscript maps of the distribution of Australian birds compiled by D.L. Serventy. These maps include records from Australian and overseas museum specimens, literature records up to about 1960 and Serventy's personal observations. They do not constitute an atlas that could be published at once but will be invaluable

for planning the RAOU Atlas Scheme.

(3) The preparation of a field card by H.J. Disney of the Australian Museum.

The list will be of abbreviated vernacular names following those used in the 1975 RAOU Checklist of the birds of Australia.

July 1976 - December 1976

The collation of historical information from existing notebooks and its storage in ABRASIC data banks on a degree square grid and grouped into three periods, 1600-1900, 1901-1950 and 1951-1976. This will be done through regional atlas organisers and will involve the membership directly. December 1976 will be the end point for the collation of these data for comparison with the distributional records generated by the atlas scheme itself.

January 1977 - December 1981

The collection, storage and analysis of the data for the Atlas of Australian Birds. The scale of this operation will be limited partly by the size of the continent to be surveyed. It is already clear that much of the inland cannot be surveyed in greater detail than on a degree square grid, whereas much of the coastal plain can be mapped on a 10' grid. Decisions on the scale of the operation must be taken in July of 1976 in the light of finance then known to be available from government sources.

January 1981 - December 1984

Preparation and publication of the Atlas of Australian Birds.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the scheme can be obtained from the organiser, P.J. Curry, 119 Dryburgh Street, North Melbourne, Vic. 3051, which is the new RAOU headquarters. Alternatively contact can be made with the local organiser, Mr G.S. Clark, 24 Adair Street, Scullin, A.C.T. 2614, telephone (062) 54 1279.

MARCH MEETING

The subject for the evening was given by Dr R. Schodde who spoke on his ornithological experiences during a recent world trip, and added a brief account of birds he had recorded in his garden at Hughes for good measure and perspective.

For Australasian birds, the most important museums for their study overseas are first the American Museum of Natural History in New York and, as important seconds, the British Museum bird room at Tring and the Rijksmuseum in Leiden. For Papuan and the nearby Indonesian island bird faunas, museums in Genoa and the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin were also important.

In his garden at Hughes Dr Schodde has recorded 77 species of birds - 73 native and 4 introduced - during the 12 years of his residence there since 1964. Some of the more interesting included the Regent Honeyeater (one pair in December 1975), Little Friarbird (one in April 1971) and Little Cuckoo-shrike (one vagrant in May 1975). Dollarbirds, Noisy Friarbirds and White-throated Warblers nested regularly in the gums in vacant land backing the garden. Flame Robins were common during the winter of 1965, occasionally present during the winter of 1966 and totally absent thereafter. This appeared to be correlated with expanding urbanisation in the Woden Valley.

Autumn and early winter produced the greatest variety of birds; most were passage migrants or vagrants that foraged widely after the breakdown of their breeding territories. Some of the more notable included the White-eared Honeyeater, Buff-rumped Thornbill, Scarlet Robin, Gang-gang Cockatoo, Rufous and Grey Fantails and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo. Mention should also be made of a party of White-fronted Chats flying over in the spring of 1966 and a Spotted Harrier in the Woden Valley in June 1975. One or two pairs of the Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis* had appeared sporadically in the Hughes area since about 1971.

Dr R. Schodde, 30 Bamford Street, Hughes, A.C.T. 2605.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia by Ben King, Martin Woodcock and E.G. Dickinson, 1975. 480 pp., 64 pl. and papers with maps. W. Collins and Co., London.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome this guide, not only because it fills a very large gap in the layman's literature on a major bird region, but also because it has been so thoroughly, accurately and thoughtfully prepared. Examples of thoroughness are to be found in the choice of 'difficult to identify' species for colour illustration, in the care given to summaries of status, habitat and extra-limital as well as south-east Asian distribution, and in the diagnostic detail in the description of each species. Here accuracy is just as manifest. In the description of the White-winged Tern, for example, characteristics of flight as well as plumage are described to separate the species from other marsh terns; and features of winter and summer plumages are summarised in full yet concise detail.

Thoughtfulness is exemplified in the layout and abbreviated phrases, all of which can be easily understood while they cut down space and wordiness. The end-papers of the book moreover are covered with regional and district maps of the region treated, for ready reference. A full and elaborate glossary to terms is given which is educational reading to the layman on its own. On the subject of education I would also commend to readers the introductory remarks dealing with English names and the reasons for their choice. This is particularly appropriate in view of some controversy now surrounding English names adopted by the RAOU Checklists. King and his co-authors have plumped for an international rather than parochial approach to the choice of names for species occurring beyond their region (cf. RAOU Checklist 1975, pt 1), and their efforts go a long way, in practice and example, towards realising the goal of international uniformity and, hopefully, ultimate stability.

These features are the ample cream on top of what is below a good, solid bread and jam guide. The overall format is standard for guides. The region covered included Burma, Thailand, all other of the former French

Indo-China countries, the Malay Peninsula and

Hong Kong. 1198 species are treated and 869 illustrated, indicating of course that South-East Asia is richer in bird life than Australia. The book itself is well bound and the text clearly printed and remarkably free from typographic errors.

In summary, I commend it unreservedly not only because of the gap that it fills but also for the added information of use to Australians on species common to South-East Asia and Australia and their near relatives.

R.S.

Flowers and Plants of New South Wales and Southern Queensland by Rotherham, Briggs, Blaxell and Carolin: published by Reed at \$18.95.

This is the latest volume of the Australian Flora in Colour series published by Reed. For those who know the series that will be comment enough. For those who do not, the book is 11 in by 9 in and contains 556 colour plates (each approx. 3 in by 4¼ in) depicting examples of the flora together with a descriptive text. The illustrations are grouped in ecological divisions.

Most bird watchers ought to know something about the flora that birds need to survive, both to forage and nest in. If your plant recognition is not up to scratch make a point of looking for this book at your booksellers because it will be a way of teaching yourself the basics of plant recognition without tears. Just to look through the book will keep you interested for hours.

G.C.

BOOK MARKET

FOR SALE

Australian Parrots - Neville Cayley (the 1938 edition) - price on application.

Birds of Port Moresby and District - Roy Mackay - \$1.00 (only one copy at this price, other copies are available at \$1.20 from Mary Martin's bookshop).

Birds of the Antarctic and sub-Antarctic - George E. Watson (a field guide to the birds of the area) \$15.00.

Bird Migration - G.V.T. Matthews (1968 edition) - \$13.00.

WANTED

A New Dictionary of Birds, ed. Sir A.L. Thomson.

A Handlist of the Birds of New South Wales by A.R. McGill.

The Birds of Borneo by B.E. Smythies.

Australian Bird Watcher - vol. I, pts 1 to 4.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE BROWN GOSHAWK

Mildred Basten

Two adult Brown Goshawks *Accipiter fasciatus* nested in early summer 1975 in a large Eucalypt in Duntroon's savannah woodland about 300 metres south of Northcott Drive. On 31 December 1975 at 9.30 a.m. one adult was observed by me and watched through binoculars. When I turned to continue my walk I was struck on the back of the head -a blow sufficient to cause me to stagger and to raise a painful lump. Subsequently both my husband and I were attacked on our daily walks in the area, but, being prepared, warded off these attacks by waving branches and facing the bird. On the date referred to, the bird which attacked followed me for nearly a mile, continually swooping and uttering its yapping cry, until eventually it was driven off by Noisy Friarbirds and Magpies.

This aggressive behaviour continued until 12 January 1976. On 26 January 1976 one juvenile was seen and on following days two adults and two juveniles, but there were no more attacks. The size of the aggressive bird suggested that it was the female.

Lady Mildred Basten, 13 Holmes Crescent, Campbell, A.C.T. 2601,

NEW C.O.G. TREASURER

Nick Winders, who was Secretary and Treasurer of C.O.G. for three years, has retired from the committee and our thanks go to him for carrying a difficult dual role for so long. Alan Taysom has accepted the role of Treasurer and we welcome him warmly.

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	1
Willie Wagtail - nomad or migrant?	2
The Nankeen Kestrel study group	4
A note on the naming of birds	6
Status of birds of Canberra and district	7
Point Hut outing	10
Further details of three rare species in the A.C.T. list	11
A multiple sighting of Great Crested Grebes	13
Out and about	14
Outing 14 March 1976	16
The Atlas of Australian Birds	17
March meeting	20
Book reviews	21
Book market	22
Observations of the Brown Goshawk	23

The Annual General Meeting on 9 June 1976 elected the following members to the C.O.G. Committee:

President: Dr R.S. Schodde *Vice-President:* Dr G. van Tets
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Editorial Panel: Messrs B. Baker, G. Clark and D.

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