canberra bird notes

ISSN 0314-8211

Volume 48
Number 2
December 2023

Registered by Australia Post 100001304

CANBERRA ORNITHOLOGISTS GROUP, INC. [COG] (CANBERRA BIRDS)

PO Box 331, Jamison Centre, ACT 2614

2023-24 Committee

President	Neil Hermes	0413 828 045
Vice-President	Kim Farley	
Secretary	Margaret Robertson	
Treasurer	Vacant	
Member	Jenny Bounds	
Member	Brittany Brockett	
Member	Zac Flegg	
Member	Bill Graham	
Member	Julie Hotchin	
Member	Ben Milbourne	
Member	Steve Read	
Member	Prue Watters	

Email Contacts

General inquiries	**cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au**
President	president@canberrabirds.org.au
Canberra Bird Notes	CBN@canberrabirds.org.au/michael.lenz.birds@gmail.com
COG Database Inquiries	COG.database@iinet.au
COG Membership	membership@canberrabirds.org.au
COG Web Discussion List	canberrabirds-owner@canberrabirds.org.au
Conservation	conservation@canberrabirds.org.au
Gang-gang Newsletter	gang-gang@canberrabirds.org.au
Garden Bird Survey Coordinator	duncan.mccaskill@gmail.com
Publications for sale	sales@canberrabirds.org.au
Unusual bird reports	rarities@canberrabirds.org.au
Website	cogwebmaster@canberrabirds.org.au
Woodland Project	cogwoodland@canberrabirds.org.au

Other COG contacts

Conservation	Jenny Bounds	
Field Trips	Sue Lashko	6251 4485 (h)
COG Membership	Sandra Henderson	6231 0303 (h)
Canberra Bird Notes		
Editor	Michael Lenz	6249 1109 (h)
Sub-Editor	Kevin Windle	6286 8014 (h)
Newsletter Editor	Zac Flegg, Gail Neumann	
Databases	Vacant	
Garden Bird Survey	Duncan McCaskill	6259 1843 (h)
Rarities Panel	Barbara Allan	6254 6520 (h)
Talks Program Organiser	Jack Holland	6288 7840 (h)
Records Officer	Nicki Taws	6251 0303 (h)
Website	Julian Robinson	6239 6226 (h)
Sales	Kathy Walter	6241 7639 (h)
Distribution of COG publications	Dianne Davey	6254 6324 (h)

Use the General Inquiries email for general enquiries. Current details of COG's Committee and other aspects of COG are available at: http://canberrabirds.org.au/

ARTICLES

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 69-78

LYREBIRD NEST AT BLACK RANGE NSW, MAY-AUGUST 2023

MATTHEW HIGGINS

mattsnowy@home.netspeed.com.au

***Abstract*:** *On 20 May 2023 at Black Range near Bega NSW Australia, I discovered the nest of a Superb Lyrebird (Menura novaehollandiae) in basic form. I recognised the nest from previous bush experience and surmised that it was new and under construction. I mounted a trail camera at the site to record activity. In this species it is only the female which builds the nest, sits on the egg and raises the chick. By 12 Jun the nest was largely completed by the Lyrebird after much effort and the placement of some hundreds of sticks and other material. From 13 Jun to 1 Jul the Lyrebird spent the period finessing the interior of the nest. On 1 Jul the Lyrebird started spending whole nights in the nest, and was absent most of the day (as is the practice with the species; incubation is not continuous). The egg was probably laid on or shortly after this date. On various dates during June-July other creatures that visited close by included Brushtail Possum, Sugar Glider, Black Rat, and Grey Shrike Thrush. On the night of 14/15 Jul the Lyrebird successfully saw off a Black Rat. During the latter weeks of July the Lyrebird began arriving earlier at the nest, spending longer in it, no doubt as hatching time was approaching. The use of an endoscopic camera for views inside the nest was not ultimately helpful, probably due to the amount of feather material on the nest floor; the egg was covered by the feathers. On the night of 31 Jul, the Lyrebird successfully saw off a Sugar Glider. On the night of 14 Aug the egg was lost when the Lyrebird vacated the nest in panic due to a combination of the presence of a Sugar Glider on the roof of the nest and either a bat or Owlet Nightjar flying too close by; the egg was subsequently eaten by the Glider. On 15 Aug, the Lyrebird briefly returned to the nest and left.*

During my times in Namadgi and Kosciuszko over the years I have learned what Superb Lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) nests look like. Since moving from Canberra to Black Range in the Bega region I have found an old nest, and regularly seen and heard Lyrebirds (especially during the winter breeding season). On 20 May this year I found what I believed to be a Lyrebird nest under construction. It was at the right height (in a tree trunk junction 2-3m above ground level), in an area where I regularly see and hear Lyrebirds; the breeding season (April-October) was underway, and there was no detritus (*e.g.* fallen leaves etc) upon the sticks, indicating they had been recently placed (Fig. 1). Also I could not think of another bird that would nest with sticks of this size, under the forest canopy.

We use trail cameras (Browning models) for various wildlife projects here and one was in use elsewhere at the time. So as soon as it was free, I placed it near the 'nest tree'. When I returned to check what it had recorded, I knew that I might be wrong and the SD card would be empty. But to my great joy I found that I had correctly identified the structure and there were over 200 short videos on the camera!

In Lyrebirds, it is only the female that builds the nest, hatches the egg and minds the (normally single) chick. During that first week of surveillance, the female Lyrebird had been

videoed by the camera on 28 May for about 15 mins after 4.03pm, on 29 May for a few mins after 8.18am,

Figure 1. The nest when I first discovered it on 20 May 2023.

Figure 2. The female building the nest with sticks.

on 3 Jun for over 3 hours after 9.50am, and on 4 Jun for 5 mins after 8.45am. I made screen shots (stills) from the videos for posting on the iNaturalist citizen science site (where we put all our nature sightings) and they showed the bird placing sticks (Fig. 2) and flying down to pick up more. I posted excitedly, 'I will continue this surveillance. I dare say this is a rare and special sighting!' And so it was.

Figure 3. The female bringing soft green material for nest lining.

My next post was on 12 Jun. During the week the female had made great progress, developing the earlier platform into a hollow sphere with a round entrance. Sticks were followed by leafy material, followed by softer green material (*e.g.* lichen etc.) for internal lining (Fig. 3). I moved the trail cam into a better position for an unfettered view. The bird worked on 7 Jun for over an hour from 9.58am, on 8 Jun for 9 hours from 8.04 am (with a lunch break!), on 9 Jun for 4 hours from 9.40am, on 10 Jun for nearly 5 hours from 7.58am, on 11 Jun for 3 hours from 9.48am and on 12 Jun for 4.5 hours until the camera was retrieved at about 11.30am (Figs. 4 and 5). A Common Brushtail Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) visited one night; once the egg was laid the Lyrebird would need to defend against such arboreal predators. The cam recorded over 400 movements this week, and with the more than 200 of the previous week that was a lot of work by this nest-builder.

During the next week (to 19 Jun) the trail cam recorded 220 movements, the female's behaviour being mostly associated with finessing the interior of the nest. Due to a clock

problem on the camera (which I later found was my error) I couldn't give exact dates of activity (apart from start and end), but I could say she worked for 6 hours one day, 3 the next, quarter hour the next, 4.5 hours the next, half hour the next and a few minutes the next. A Grey Shrike Thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*) visited the nest. The female had not been present at any of my visits to date, which was fortunate as I was always wary of the risk of disturbing her.

Figure 4. The nest on 12 June.

Figure 5. The nest (indicated) as seen from my observation post.

The week to 27 June saw the female continuing to finesse the nest interior, rearranging materials and possibly still taking in small material from the forest floor. The trail cam recorded her on 20 Jun for 5 mins, on 23 Jun for 4 hours, and on 24 Jun for 4 mins. Strong winds interfered on 25-26 June so there was a lot of camera movement but no Lyrebird activity. I used my 'day' camera on flash for some interior shots of the nest, difficult on account of the nest's height. No egg was yet visible.

As July began, the highlight was that the female started sitting in the nest at night (Fig. 6). This began on the night of 1/2 Jul and was caught again by the camera on the following night. The videos show her preening at various times. So maybe the egg had been laid, though it was not visible on cameras or to the naked eye when I visited to retrieve/restore the camera card. Again a Brushtail Possum visited on 27 Jun.

Figure 6. The female in the nest at night.

During the eight days/nights to 12 Jul the trail cam recorded over 1100 videos. They showed the female staying in the nest at night, arriving generally around 4-5pm and leaving around 7.30am. She spent the night preening, settling herself and occasionally sleeping (presumably!). The gentle settling motion looked like that of other birds when they are on an egg, yet I pondered whether the bird's absence during the day indicated that the egg was not yet laid. At that time, I had not yet read research papers which subsequently confirmed for me that Lyrebird incubation is not continuous and the female is usually absent during the day, leaving the egg unincubated for several hours. As well as having the trail cam at the site, I had an 'observation post' about 50m away, where I could sit on a log and watch (Fig. 5). From there I saw the bird make momentary daylight visits to the nest to check all was well before fluttering back down to the forest floor (Figs. 7 and 8).

As mentioned, owing to the nest's height above the ground it was very difficult to see right into it. I tried a mirror mounted on a stick (suggested by ecologist friend Don Fletcher) but the angles were too difficult. The best way to get a good image inside the nest with my 'day'

camera was to stand on tiptoe on a log and stretch my camera arm as high as possible, using flash (obviously the bird was away at these times, which were when I also retrieved the trail

Figure 7. The female usually cautiously landed on this trunk of *Pittosporum* before entering the nest.

Figure 8. Typical view of the female leaving the nest.

cam card for downloading). Photos taken in this fashion revealed that the nest floor was lined with Lyrebird feathers – some of which I first thought were male. But there were many other feathers which I now think came from the female herself and were a result of the repetitive preening –perhaps she was plucking feathers from herself for the nest lining (Fig. 9). The trail cam did not show her carrying feathers to the nest. No egg was yet visible.

Figure 9. The feather lining in the nest which insulated and obscured the egg. I believe that most of these feathers came from the female as a result of 'harvesting' preening.

On 19 Jul I posted that the female continued to spend the nights on the nest, arriving generally around 4pm and leaving around 7.30am the next morning. Her behaviour on the

nest continued to include preening and settling, certainly looking like she was on an egg. It was at this point that I asked the question on iNaturalist: 'Maybe these birds only need to incubate at night?' Given that the female has to mind the egg without any assistance from the male, this could be a factor too, as she has to get out and feed herself. There was a little drama on the night of 14/15 Jul when a rat visited (Black Rat (*Rattus rattus*), not Bush Rat (*Rattus fuscipes*), judging by the length of the tail), and the Lyrebird had to defend the nest against it. The rat first arrived at 9.54pm and returned at 5.14am. This is an example of introduced rats being a risk to native birds.

After some severe winds, one day the female briefly visited the nest to check all was well before returning for her nightly vigil about 90mins later. Just over 200 video clips were recorded by the trail camera this week, a big drop from the 1100 of the previous week, indicating presumably that she was moving less on the nest at night, though I believe that trail cams do not pick up every movement anyway. Thanks to friends Michael Mulvaney and Don Fletcher I decided to purchase an endoscopic camera so that I could see into the nest more effectively and to hopefully see the egg, which I was confident was there, given that the female had been making these nightly stays for several weeks by now. During the next week the female continued to sit in the nest at night, arriving now a bit earlier at around 2-3pm and leaving punctually at around 7.30am the next morning. This time, as well as the usual trail cam video screen shots, I also posted on iNaturalist two from the endoscopic camera inside the nest; the hoped-for egg was not visible but there were a lot of feathers in there. I was grateful to Michael Mulvaney for information on these cameras and to Stephanie Haygarth for assistance with wifi set-up (*i.e.* the endoscopic camera sends images to your phone by wifi; phone held in one hand, cam pole in the other!). I was ultimately frustrated by the endo cam as images were not clear, quite likely due to all the feathers inside the nest and no distinct objects for the camera to focus on.

Later that afternoon, when I returned to reinstall the trail cam after the usual download of images at home, the female had returned to the nest earlier than usual, and I was able to take a photo of her in the nest with my 'day' camera, but from a safe distance. So as not to disturb her, I had no choice but to mount the trail cam on a tree further away; I moved it to the usual tree the following day when she was away.

Figure 10. Altercation with a Sugar Glider, 31 Jul.

By the next posting there were over 670 new videos on the trail camera, showing a lot of movement by the female on the nest during her night residency there. As well as preening, there was a lot of side-to-side settling, highly indicative of her being on an egg; also she put her beak down underneath herself, perhaps egg-turning? She continued to arrive earlier at the nest of an afternoon, around 1.30/2pm, though once at 3.14pm. I figured that this earlier arrival reflected her awareness of the approach of the hatching time. She was departing regularly around 7.30am each morning. There were two visitors during this period. There was a Sugar Glider (*Petaurus breviceps*) at 6.17pm and 11.06pm on 26 Jul, and a rat at 4.01am on 24 Jul. By now it was just about four weeks since she began spending the nights

in the nest; the laying to hatching period for Lyrebirds is around 6-7 weeks. Though the egg had not been seen, I presumed it was covered by the feathers, which ended up being true.

The next posting covered the period 28 July afternoon to 6 August morning. The female arrived at the nest usually between 1 and 2pm (though once just before noon) and left between 7 and 7.30am. The bird's behaviour continued to include preening, side-to-side settling and movement of the head underneath herself, indicative of her being on the egg. This week was marked by repeated night visits by a Sugar Glider, on 30 Jul at 7.24pm, 31 Jul 2.15-2.19am, and on 3 Aug at 1.03am. The 31 Jul visit saw interaction, with the Lyrebird making pecking motions toward the Glider when it got too close and when it glided away (Fig. 10). The female clearly was determined to mount a defence against this potential egg thief. Whether it was the same Glider on each occasion, and as seen previously, I am in no position to tell. It was now five weeks since the Lyrebird began occupying the nest all night.

Through the next week the female continued to sit in the nest each afternoon and night, generally arriving around 1-1.45pm and leaving 7-7.30am next morning. As the week progressed, she made a number of repeat visits, perhaps checking to see if hatching had occurred? It was now 6 weeks since she began occupying the nest at night and so my expectations of imminent hatching were high. A Grey Shrike Thrush briefly appeared at the nest on 10 August at 9.30am but did not seem to have entered it.

I made my last post on 17 Aug. A couple of days previously I thought something was amiss when I visited the Lyrebird nest (at a time when I knew the female would not be egg-sitting), and there were feathers from the floor of the nest lying bedraggled around and outside the nest entrance. I revisited at times when she should have been there, but she was not. So I retrieved the trail camera on the morning of 17 Aug to see what was going on. All was well on 13 Aug, and 14 Aug afternoon, with the Lyrebird attending the nest as previously. Then on the 14th at 6.45pm a Sugar Glider arrived. It returned at 8.45. Two minutes later, in movements too quick for the trail camera to completely capture, 'something' flying very close caused the Lyrebird to panic and abandon the nest: the video shows the nest vacant, and the Lyrebird's alarm calls sounded loud just off camera. The Sugar Glider too was alarmed on top of the nest, and a blurred flying creature is close by. Judging by the video of this incident, I can only think the creature was a bat or an Owlet Nightjar (*Aegotheles cristatus*); it is too small for an owl. You would not think these would scare a Lyrebird, but maybe combined with the stress of the Glider she had had enough. Maybe she was inexperienced and this was her first egg. Maybe the Glider was the target of the nightjar, though this seems unlikely. Perhaps the bat/nightjar was simply hunting moths and came too close to the Lyrebird.

Sadly, vacating the nest was fatal to the egg. The Sugar Glider entered the nest 8 minutes later, brought out the egg and proceeded to eat it. There is a length of dark material protruding from the egg, presumably part of the advanced embryo. Next morning 15 August at 6.35am the Lyrebird returned to the nest but left 12 mins later. She returned again at 5.25 that afternoon and soon left. Later that night a rat spent quite some time at the nest. Next night 16 August a rat and a Sugar Glider both came back to the nest for short times.

Figure 11. 14 Aug evening: the Sugar Glider on the nest roof just before the Lyrebird vacated it.

So, after all that effort by the female Lyrebird, building the nest, sitting on the egg for over six weeks each night and increasingly in the afternoons as well, and so close to hatching, her breeding attempt was terminated for this season. Whether there is any chance of her mating again this season I do not know; male mimicry/display calls have tapered right off now. But I will leave the trail cam in situ for a while longer.

Figure 12. 14 Aug evening: The Lyrebird has left the nest, the flying creature is blurred just left of the Sugar Glider.

Figure 13. 14 Aug evening: the Sugar Glider eating the egg after pulling it out of the nest interior.

Ironically, my first short nature documentary, in 2004, was called 'The Little Aerialists of Ainslie', which was screened around Australia in the CSIRO Scinema film festival. It was about Sugar Gliders. I still love these arboreal mammals, who of course have just as much right to live in the bush as Lyrebirds. It is just such a bugger when they eat the baby bird that you have been waiting for weeks to hatch. And the Glider is not the villain of this piece; a combination of circumstances led to the end of this potential hatchling.

Some helpful sources:

Lill, A. (1979) Nest inattentiveness and its influence on development of the young in the Superb Lyrebird. *The Condor* 81: 225-231.

Menkhorst, P., Rogers, D., Clarke, R., Davies, J., Marsack, P. and Franklin, K. (2017) *The Australian Bird Guide*. CSIRO Publishing, Clayton South.

https://australian.museum/learn/animals/birds/superb-lyrebird/

https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/native-animals/native-animal-facts/lyrebirds

Accepted 2 September 2023

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 79-95

OUT-OF-SEASON MOVEMENT OF SOME TALL FOREST BIRD SPECIES FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO LOWER-LYING WOODLANDS AND SUBURBIA

MICHAEL LENZ

117/50 Ellenborough St, Lyneham ACT 2602, Australia

michael.lenz.birds@gmail.com

Abstract: *Surveys in the 1980s at the lowland Mt Ainslie woodland reserve in the Australian Capital Territory revealed that Australian Golden Whistler* (Pachycephala pectoralis)*, Rufous Fantail* (Rhipidura rufifrons)*, Satin Flycatcher* (Myiagra cyanoleuca) *and Rose Robin* (Petroica rosea)*, breeding species of the tall wet sclerophyll forest of the mountains, could also be present during their breeding season at low altitudes. They were often recorded after (thunder)storms. All birds were singing, were restless and often moved on within a short period. General records (1986-2019) and Garden Bird Survey Abundance values (A) (averaged over 41 years) from the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) were used to evaluate whether the patterns observed at Mt Ainslie were of more general occurrence. The months August to March were considered, including spring migration and much of the breeding season in the mountains. Records were separated into those from the mountains and those from lower-lying woodlands and suburbia. The distribution of records for both habitats and as far as the records allow, the timing of the breeding season in the mountains, are described for each species. Mountain birds recorded at low altitudes during their breeding season could have different origins: (1) migrants passing through the ACT on their way to breeding areas further South; (2) birds delaying their spring movement to the mountains or even staying at low altitudes; and (3) 'floaters', i.e. non-territorial birds awaiting future breeding opportunities (filling vacancies among the breeders or seeking extra-pair copulations). The latter are mostly males and are usually present at sites around the edges of an area occupied by the breeding population.*

Weather factors greatly affect all aspects of the life history of birds. The impact of localised (thunder)storms during spring and summer is relevant to the observations reported here. The storms seem to trigger downhill movement of wet sclerophyll forest species. Breeding pairs which have already invested in a brood (eggs, young) are more likely to try to sit out a storm to safeguard their brood, while floaters, in general considered to be more mobile, have no such ties and are far more likely to avoid the impact of storms by moving to lower altitudes. Before the breeding season is too well advanced, while breeding opportunities may still arise, floaters would benefit from returning to the breeding population in the mountains after the storms. When the breeding season is well under way, storms may cause them to disperse and not return to the site of the breeding population. This proposition aligns with the observations at Mt Ainslie: the mountain species were rather restless, and most likely moved back to the mountains, and were not observed after late December, towards the end of the breeding season.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s I surveyed birds quite regularly on the lower western slopes of the Mt Ainslie woodland reserve in the NE of Canberra. I followed a 2.5 km circular route, recording all birds seen and heard. A gully with dense vegetation in and around it (including many exotics

and Cootamundra Wattle), and stands of taller eucalypts formed the northern flank of the route. During the spring and autumn migration it was mainly along the gully area that species such as Australian Golden Whistler (*Pachycephalus pectoralis*) [hereafter Golden Whistler], Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*), Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra cyanoleuca*), and Rose Robin (*Petroica rosea*) were encountered. These were presumably on their way to or from their breeding sites in the mountain ranges of COG's Area of Interest and NSW. Their breeding habitat is the tall wet sclerophyll forest [WSF] (Cooper and McAllan 1999; Steve Read, pers. commun). However, on several occasions the same species were also recorded unexpectedly at the Mt Ainslie site at a time when they were assumed to be at their breeding sites in the WSF of the mountains, not in low-altitude woodland. Notably, some observations were preceded by overnight (thunder)storms. Having posited this hypothetical connection, whenever possible I would visit the gully area on mornings following a heavy storm between late spring and early summer, specifically in search of these WSF species.

Using records from the Canberra Ornithologists Group (COG) database, this article explores the extent to which the occurrence of WSF species in low-lying woodlands and suburbia during their breeding season is part of a more general pattern for the Canberra region, *i.e.* COG's Area of Interest (for detail see Canberra Ornithologists Group 2012).

2. Materials and Methods

COG made records from its database available for the four species over the period 1986 to 2019. I selected the months August to March (only August to January for the Golden Whistler due to the high number of records). This period covers spring migration and much of the breeding season in the mountains (see Table 1).

My Mt Ainslie records are included in the COG database. Additional field notes to the Mt Ainslie set of records were incorporated in Sect. 3.1.

The records were separated into those originating from WSF in the mountains (*e.g.* Brindabellas, Namadgi, Tallaganda SF) and woodlands and suburbia at lower altitudes (Table 1). Information from the COG records and the literature was used to determine the length of the breeding season of the WSF species in the mountains in our region.

Table 1. Number of records from the COG database considered for the analysis.

Species	Period	Number of records		
		Mountains	Woodlands & suburbia	Total
Golden Whistler	Aug - Jan	1461	2493	3954
Rufous Fantail	Aug - Mar	569	229	798
Satin Flycatcher	Aug - Mar	717	160	877
Rose Robin	Aug - Mar	334	289	623

Each month was divided into three ten-day periods: **E**arly, **M**id and **L**ate. From these records graphs were prepared in order to reveal seasonal patterns and how often WSF birds appeared in woodlands and suburbia during their breeding season.

In addition, COG provided A (Abundance)[1] values from the Garden Bird Survey (GBS) averaged over 41 years. These results are also presented as graphs.

[1] "**A** Measure of abundance. This is the average number of individuals of a species recorded at a site for each week over the full year. It is obtained by adding all weekly observations of the species and dividing the sum by the total number of weeks in which observations were made." (Canberra Ornithologists Group 2020).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Mt Ainslie observations from the 1980s

In most cases, out-of-season observations of WSF species at the Mt Ainslie site (elevation 620 to 650 m) involved a few individuals of one or two species. On various occasions the presence of these birds at the site did not seem to be linked to local storm activity, but storms further away from Canberra may have driven the birds down to lower altitudes. The size of the source area from which the birds originated is unknown.

Sometimes three to four species were encountered on the same morning (Table 2), including on one occasion a Black-faced Monarch (*Monarca melanopsis*), another species from tall WSF and rainforest with a more coastal distribution (Frith 1976; Hermes 2017) (Table 2). Golden Whistlers were more likely to occur in multiples with a maximum of five. These were always 'brown' birds in basic plumage, most likely immature males. The highest numbers for Satin Flycatcher and Rufous Fantail per visit were three and seven birds respectively, mostly as singles (Table 2).

In this context, two Common Cicadabirds (*Edolisoma tenuirostris*), another WSF species from the mountains, were encountered on 25 Oct 2020 on the western side of Mt Ainslie (M. Lenz), following a couple of days of heavy rain and wind. Another one was observed two days later at the Callum Brae woodland (Alister Smith) in Canberra. The species is rarely encountered away from the mountains.

Table 2. Highest numbers of out-of-season wet sclerophyll forest species along the survey route at Mt Ainslie in the 1980s.

Date	Species	Comments
28.10.1989	5 Golden Whistlers, 2 Satin Flycatchers*, 1 Rufous Fantail, 1 Rose Robin	thunderstorm the day before
29.10.1983	4 Golden Whistlers 3 Satin Flycatcher, 7 Rufous Fantails	no local storm
08.11.1989	2 Golden Whistlers 1 Satin Flycatcher (+ 1 in Ainslie suburb), 1 Rufous Fantail	thunderstorm overnight; birds moving through quickly
09.11.1980	2 Satin Flycatcher, 1 Rufous Fantail, 1 Black-faced Monarch	thunderstorm overnight

*Note: The passing Satin Flycatchers could readily be compared to the several pairs of breeding Leaden Flycatchers (*Myiagra rubecula*) at the Mt Ainslie site (see also ABSA 2019).

Most birds of all species were singing when recorded. It was noticeable that the birds were rather restless and many had moved on within the time of the survey, as indicated from spot checks after the survey of areas where these birds were seen earlier in the morning.

Table 3. Distribution of the number of visits with records of wet sclerophyll forest species from the Mt Ainslie site.

Month	Oct E	Oct M	Oct L	Nov E	Nov M	Nov L	Dec E	Dec M	Dec L
No. visits	0	2	4	3	2	3	2	4	0

The distribution of the number of visits with out-of-season birds across all species from Mt Ainslie is given in Table 3.

The latest records of WSF species at the time of their breeding season in the mountains were in early to mid December (Table 4).

Table 4. Last out-of-season observations of wet sclerophyll forest species at the Mt Ainslie site.

Species	Date of last observation
Australian Golden Whistler	01 Dec 1983
Rufous Fantail	11 Dec 1989
Satin Flycatcher	20 Nov 1982
Rose Robin	18 Oct 1989*

*The only out-of-season record.

Additional out-of-season records of WSF species from occasional visits to the western side of Mt Ainslie in later years are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Later occasional records of out-of-season wet sclerophyll forest species on the lower SW slope of Mt Ainslie.

Date	Species	Comments
28.10.2006	1 Golden Whistler, 1 Satin Flycatcher	no local storm
29.10.2011	25 Golden Whistlers, 2 Satin Flycatchers, 2 Rufous Fantails	light drizzle
02.11.2003	1 Golden Whistler, 1 Rufous Fantail	no local storm
27.11. 2009	1 Satin Flycatcher, 2 Rufous Fantails	thunderstorm
22.12.2006	1 Golden Whistler, 1 Rufous Fantail	no local storm

Of note is the observation from 29.10.2011 (a Blitz morning) when two groups (10 + 15) of Golden Whistlers were encountered and two other WSF species (Table 5). However, on this day was no local storm recorded (as in a couple of other examples, see Tables 2 and 5). Any storm that may have triggered these movements, may have occurred some distance from Canberra.

3.2. Individual species

3.2.1. **Australian Golden Whistler**

In the Canberra Region the Golden Whistler is a 'common breeding altitudinal migrant' (Taylor and COG 1992). The species breeds in the WSF above 1300 m. Most birds move to lower altitudes after the breeding season, and are present in woodlands and suburbia between April and September (October) (Taylor and COG 1992; Purchase and Wilson 1999; Veerman 2003).

The records for the period August to January show high numbers of birds at lower elevations with a peak in mid September and a steady decline thereafter. The peak shown in Fig. 1a at the end of October for both habitat types is due to intensive birdwatching across the ACT during COG's Bird Blitz weekend in the latter part of the month (see *e.g.* Allan 2019). Disregarding this peak, the trend of declining numbers in woodlands and suburbia through

to December, based on general COG records, corresponds with the decline in A values from the GBS (Fig. 1b).

Overall lower numbers of records from the mountains are a reflection of fewer visits to those parts of the ACT and COG's Area of Interest, compared to the closer and more accessible woodlands and suburbia, except during the breeding season, when many targeted visits are conducted to see the summer migrant specials of the higher ranges (Fig. 1a). However, the Blitz effort clearly shows that at least by the end of October the Golden Whistler is a common species in the WSF of the mountains.

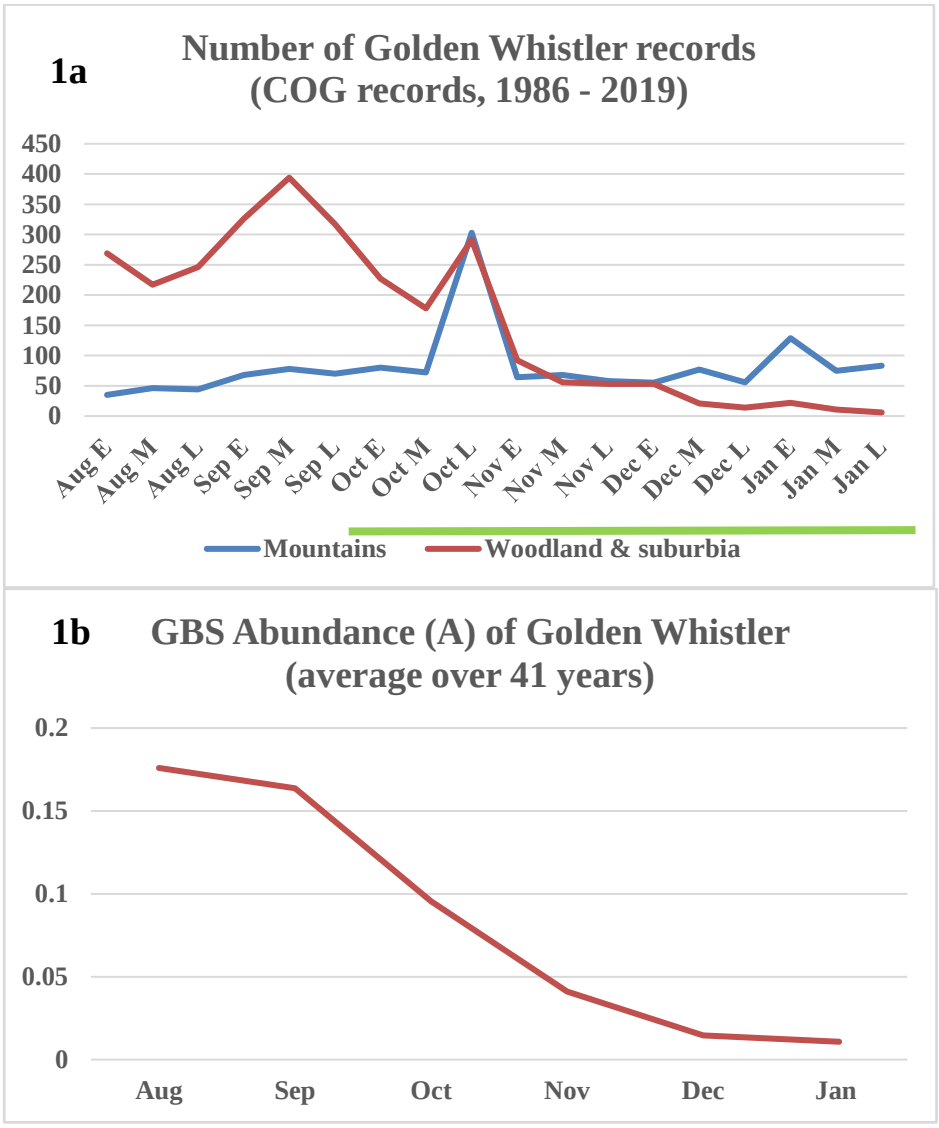


Figure 1. (1a) Seasonal distribution of Australian Golden Whistler records in the mountains and woodlands and suburbia and (1b) Abundance (A) in the Garden Bird Survey (GBS). Note: The peak in records in late October in Fig. 1a reflects the increased observation effort during COG's annual Bird Blitz weekend across the ACT. **The green line in Fig. 1a below the x-axis denotes the breeding season [it extends to early March] (Table 6).**

There are only few local breeding records available. The breeding season extends from early September to early March. Table 6 combines the information from Taylor and COG (1992) and records in the COG database. Most breeding for NSW as a whole takes place between September and January (Cooper *et al.* 2020).

Breeding in the mountains commences in late September, when many birds are still present in the lowlands (Fig. 1a, Table 6). This most likely indicates that we see not only vertical migration from low to high altitudes, but also birds passing through our area in late September on their N/S migration, to parts of their breeding range to the south of the ACT (Griffioen and Clarke 2002).

A few lowland breeding records, including a bird on a nest at Lake Burley Griffin on 27 Aug 1988 (Barbara Allan), are noteworthy, being much earlier than nesting occurs in the mountains. Taylor and COG (1992) mention a few more records from Lake Ginninderra. Veerman (2003) gives a GBS observation of a dependent young, although it was most likely hatched far away from the garden site.

Table 6. Seasonal distribution of Golden Whistler breeding records in the ACT, based on Taylor and COG (1992) and COG records.

Sep L	Oct E	Oct M	Oct L	Nov E	Nov M	Nov L	Dec E	Dec M	Dec L	Jan E	Jan M	Jan L	Mar E
nb													
				on									
											ny		
									dy		**dy**	**dy**	**dy**
			br				**br**		**br**	**br**			

nb: nest building; **o**n: on nest; **ny**: nest with young; **dy**: dependent young; **br**: unspecified breeding activity.

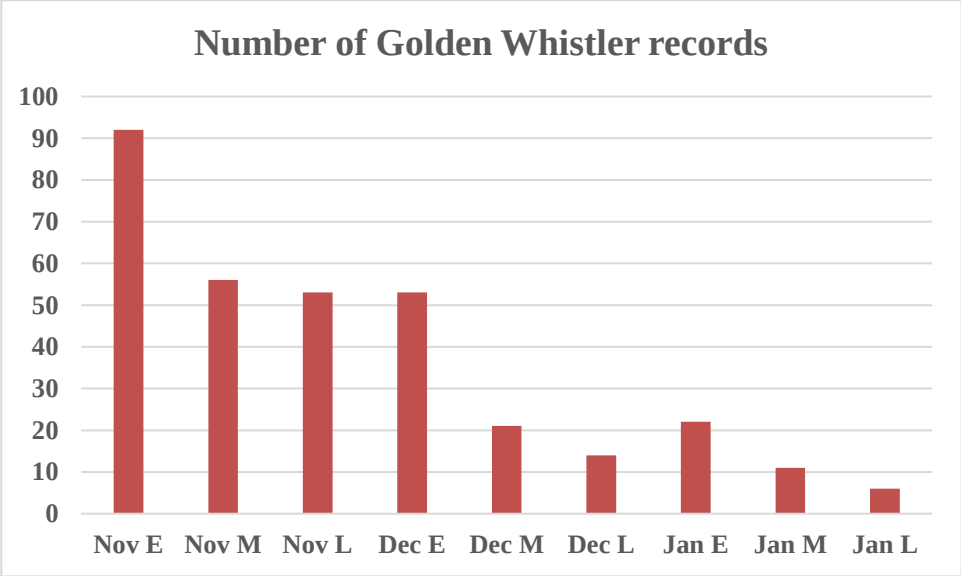


Figure 2. Number of Golden Whistler records in woodlands and suburbia during the main part of the breeding season in the mountains.

The species is still recorded relatively frequently at lower altitudes right through November and early December, numbers decline thereafter to the lowest number by the end of January (Fig. 2).

3.2.2. **Rufous Fantail**

The status of the Rufous Fantail in the ACT is described as ‘uncommon breeding summer migrant’ with ‘the inward migration …prolonged, their residence brief and their departure abrupt’ (Taylor and COG 1992). During its passage to and from its breeding grounds in the

gullies of the WSF at higher altitudes, it moves through lowland areas and often appears in suburbia (Taylor and COG 1992; Wilson 1999; Veerman 2003).

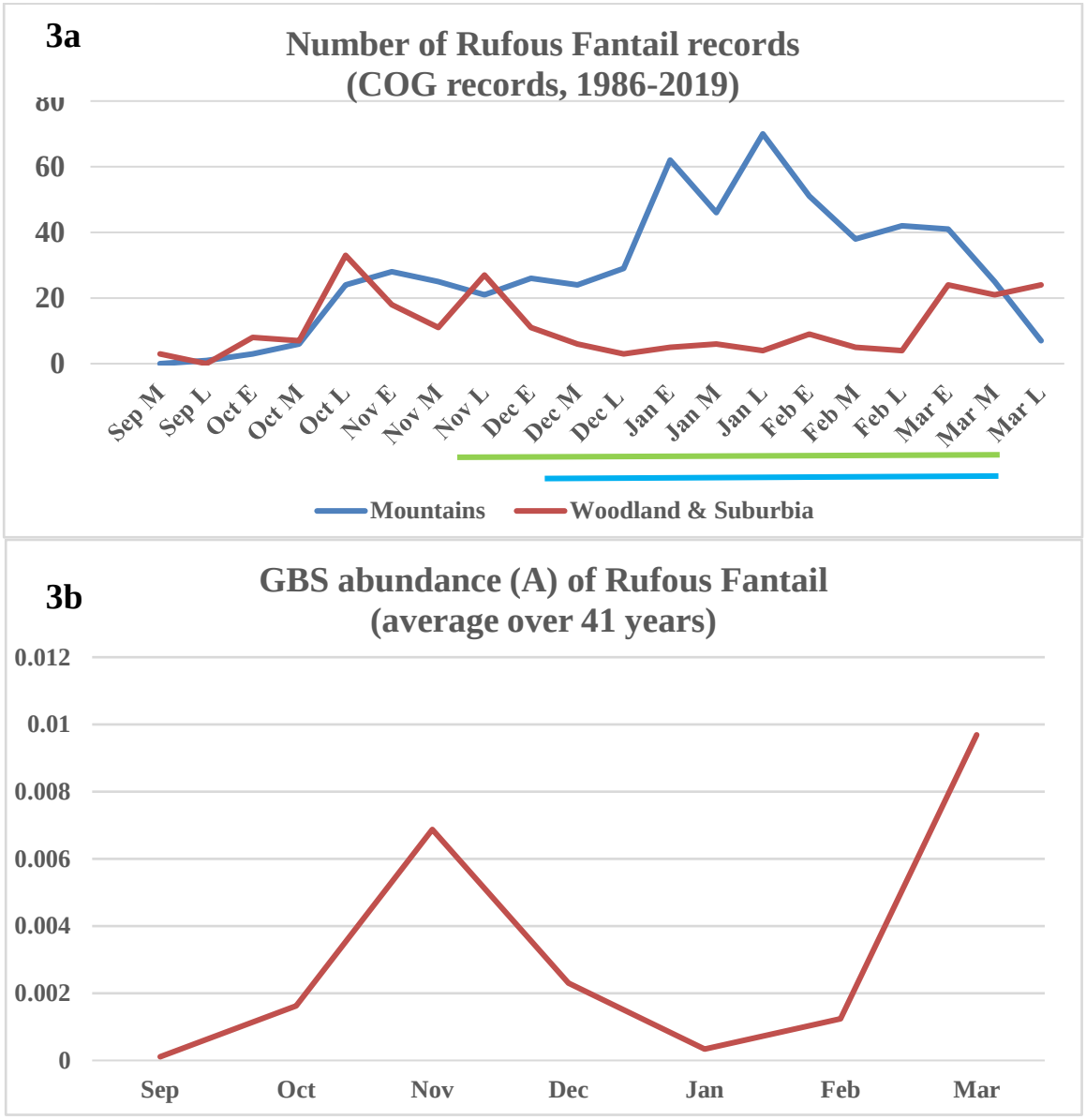


Figure 3. (3a) Seasonal distribution of Rufous Fantail records in the mountains, woodlands and suburbia and (3b) Abundance (A) in the Garden Bird Survey (GBS). Note: The peak in records in late October in Fig. 3a reflects the increased observation effort during COG's annual Bird Blitz weekend across the ACT. **The upper (green) line in Fig. 3a below the x-axis denotes the approximate maximum length of the breeding season, the lower line (blue) the minimum length based on the data in Tables 7and 8, calculated from the first COG observation of dependent young in mid January.**

Birds appear first in the lowlands by mid September. Records are at their maximum between late October and late November and again in late March (Fig. 3). The species is recorded in the mountains from late September. The number of records increases to a maximum in early November and stays at a plateau until late December. High numbers of records from late December to mid February are most likely an indication of the many targeted visits for the

summer migrant specials of the higher ranges, as also indicated for the Golden Whistler (see Sect. 3.2.1.), rather than an increase in numbers.

There are only very few breeding records available. The scarcity of records is a reflection of the more secretive behaviour of the species and its preference for nesting in the dense vegetation of gullies. Dependent young have been observed between mid January and mid March (Taylor and COG 1992; Table 7). However, the breeding season clearly starts earlier, dependent young having been observed as early as 17 Jan [the observation of a bird carrying food on 15 Jan (Table 7) could be of an adult bringing food to young or a male feeding the female (Higgins *et al.* 2006)].

Higgins *et al*. (2006) and Boles *et al.* (2020) provide details for the length of time (days) for the different parts of the breeding cycle (Table 8). These values were used to calculate the start of the breeding season in the WSF of the mountains, taking as the starting point the first observation of dependent young from the COG records in mid January. This gives an approximate start of the breeding season between mid November and early December. Based on the records, it extends as late as mid March, mainly because fledglings stay with their parents for an extended period (Table 8, see Fig. 3).

Table 7. Seasonal distribution of COG breeding records for the Rufous Fantail.

Jan M	Jan L	Feb E	Feb M	Feb L	Mar E	Mar M
		ne				
	on					
cf						
dy	**2x dy**			**dy**	**3x dy**	**2x dy**

ne: nest; **o**n: on nest; **cf:** carrying food **dy**: dependent young.

Table 8. Minimum and maximum number of days for the different parts of the Rufous Fantail breeding cycle [based on Higgins *et al*. (2006) and Boles *et al.* (2020)].

No. days	Territory estab-lishment	Nest building	Clutch (2-3 eggs)	Incu-bation	Fledging	Indepen-dence	Total days
Minimum	10	8	2	15	11	28	74
Maximum	21	15	3	17	11	37	104

There are a number of lowland records over the breeding season between mid November and late February, with a peak in late November (Fig. 4). By early March, birds are found again in the lowlands. By late March the species has vacated the mountains.

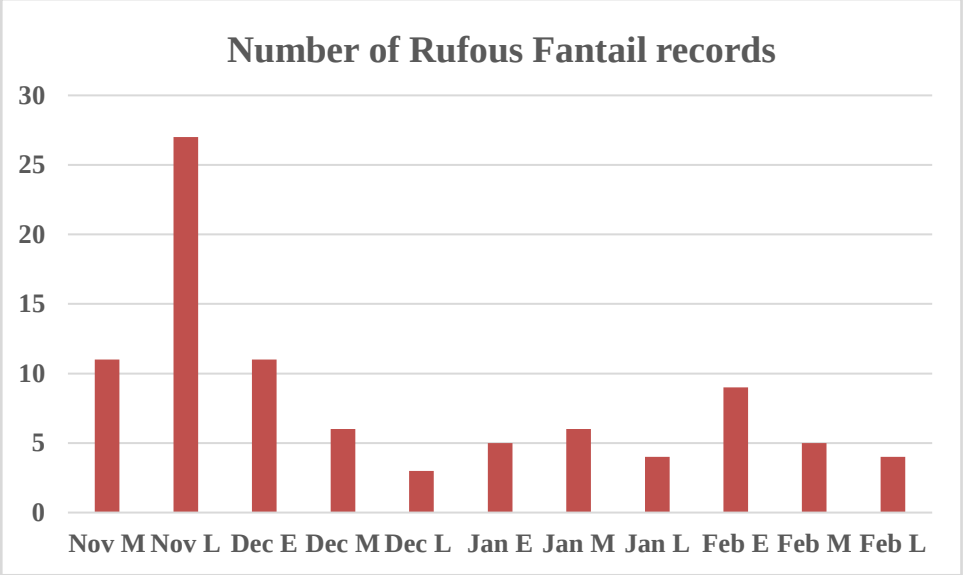


Figure 4. Number of Rufous Fantail records in woodlands and suburbia during the breeding season in the mountains.

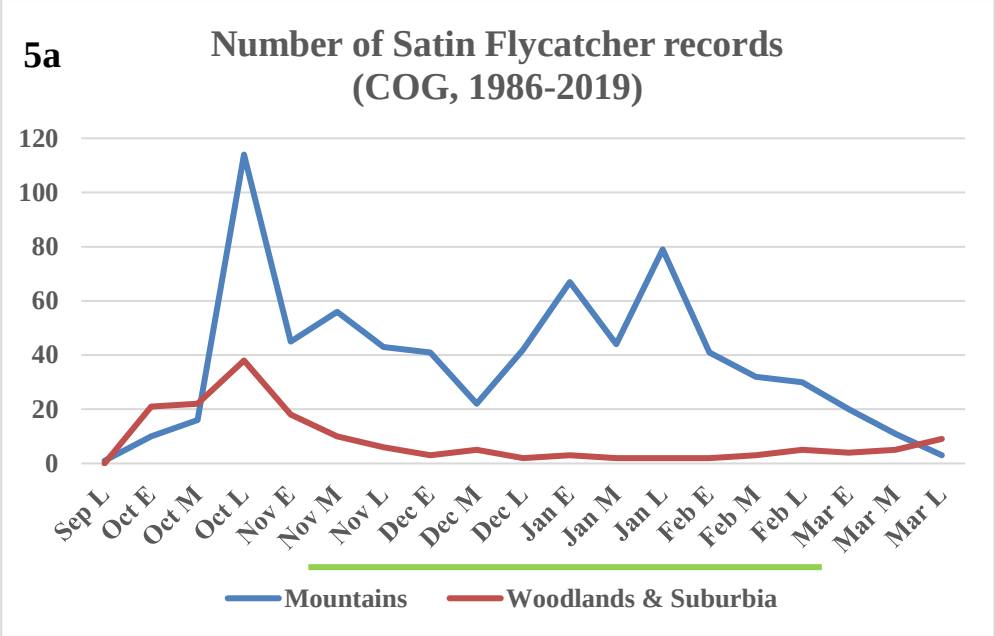
3.2.3. **Satin Flycatcher**

The species arrives in our area in late September, and during October it has fully occupied its breeding range in the WSF of the mountains (Taylor and COG 1992). During both inward and outward migration, Satin Flycatchers are also encountered in different lowland habitats (Taylor and COG 1992; Veerman 2003). The seasonal pattern of the number of records (Fig. 5) shows a sharp peak in October in the mountains (Fig. 5a), and a much lower peak in the woodlands and suburbia (Fig. 5b), a reflection of the synchronous arrival of the species in its mountain WSF habitat over October (Taylor and COG 1992) and heightened observer activity during COG's October Blitz. The higher number of records in January to early February, are, as for other species, a reflection of observers seeking out these mountain species early in the year.

In parts of its breeding range the species overlaps with the Leaden Flycatcher. The latter occupies more open forest while the Satin Flycatcher prefers moister, taller forest and is also not found below 800m (Taylor and COG 1992). Separation of the two species in the field can be difficult (ABSA 2019).

'The Satin Flycatcher is a desirable species for birders and some birders think that if they are in the mountains then it must be a Satin', hence eBird records for the Satin Flycatcher require more detailed documentation (Kim Farley, pers. commun.). Some records assigned to Satin Flycatchers among the general COG records may well have been Leaden Flycatchers, a possible scenario also mentioned for GBS observations (Veerman 2003). However, it is impossible to determine any misidentifications in hindsight. The only records I have not included in this analysis are two breeding records from lowland open woodlands. In one of those cases, I had visited the specific area several times in the year in question and could record only nesting Leaden Flycatchers.

The species is active in the upper canopy of trees, and hence is more readily observed than the other WSF species covered in this article. As a result, we have also a notable number of breeding records for the Satin Flycatcher (Fig. 6, Table 9).



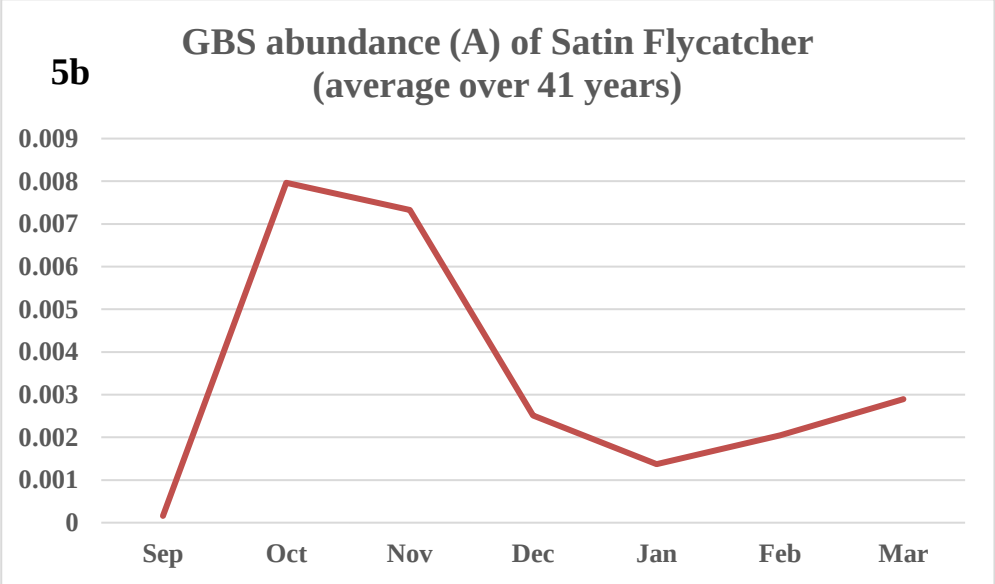


Figure 5. (5a) Seasonal distribution of Satin Flycatcher records in the mountains, woodlands and suburbia and (5b) Abundance (A) in the Garden Bird Survey (GBS). Note: **The (green) line in Fig. 5a below the x-axis denotes the approximate maximum length of the breeding season** (see Fig. 6 and Table 8 for details).

Based on the COG records, the breeding season lasts for about four months, more or less in line with reports in other references (Higgins and Peter 2006; Cooper *et al.* 2020). It takes about 35 days from egg to independent young (plus extra days for pair formation, nest building and laying) (Higgins and Peter 2006). According to Gregory (2020) only a single brood is raised. This would allow a pair ample time to raise a brood and also respond to losses of eggs or young in the nest with a replacement brood. In theory, with a breeding season of four months, pairs could even raise a second brood under favourable conditions. In the Leaden Flycatcher, double-brooding has been observed and replacement nests have been built up to six times in a season (Higgins and Peter 2006). One option for raising two successive broods, observed in Leaden Flycatcher pairs at Mt Ainslie (M. Lenz, pers. obs.), is to have overlapping broods. The second brood is started (nest building, laying and

incubation) before the young of the first brood are independent. Males would mostly care for the fledglings while the females took on a greater share of nest building and incubation. As Fig. 6 and Table 9 indicate, there are extended periods, and more than one peak for the main aspects of the breeding cycle of the Satin Flycatcher. However, since these observations were not collected in a systematic way and over several years, they may be a reflection of high nest predation rates and replacement broods rather than regular double-brooding. Higgins and Peter (2006) also do not mention double brooding in this species.

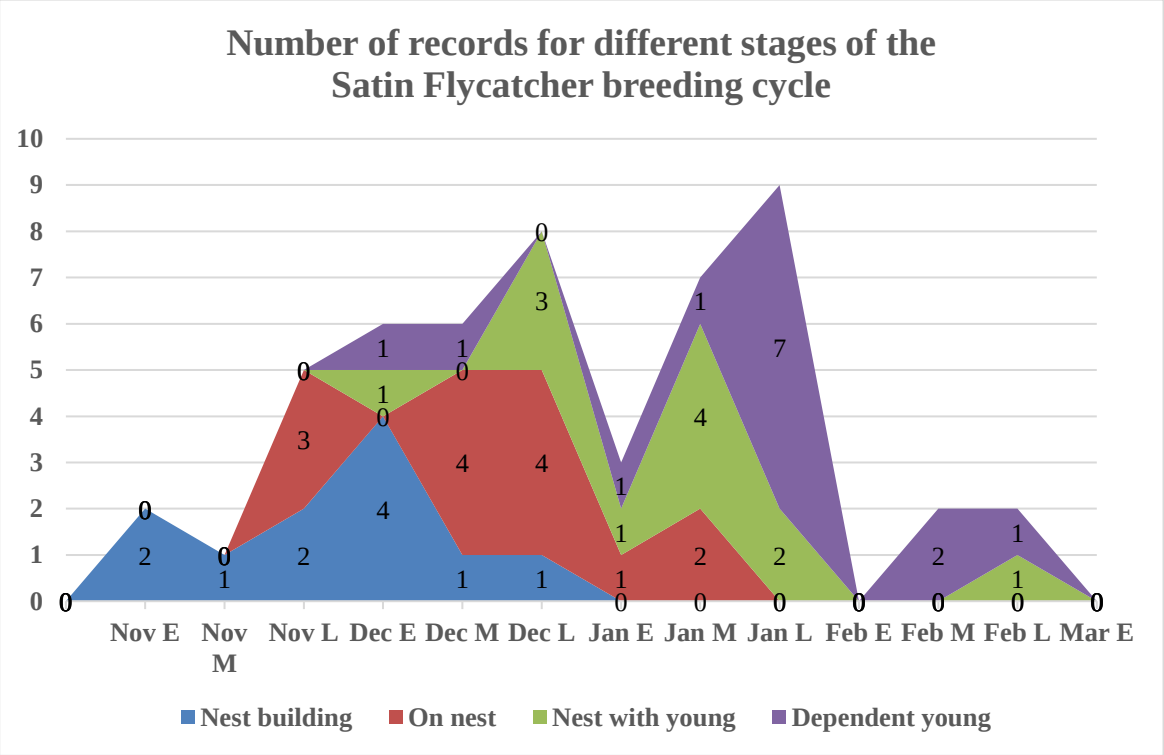


Figure 6. Stacked area chart of the number of records for different stages of the Satin Flycatcher breeding cycle in the mountains of the Canberra region.

Table 9. Length of breeding activity in the Satin Flycatcher (based on the COG records, depicted in Fig. 6).

Breeding activity	**Period**	
Nest building	E Nov to L Dec	
On nest	L Nov to M Jan	
Nest with young	E Dec to L Jan	L Feb
Dependent young	E Dec to L Jan	M to L Feb
Total	E Nov to L Feb	

A fairly high number of records in late October in woodlands and suburbia (Fig. 7) may indicate that quite a few birds are still passing through the ACT to breeding areas S of the ACT and that the altitudinal movement is not yet complete. However, it is notable that the species is recorded in small numbers at lower altitudes right through the breeding period, from early November to late February.

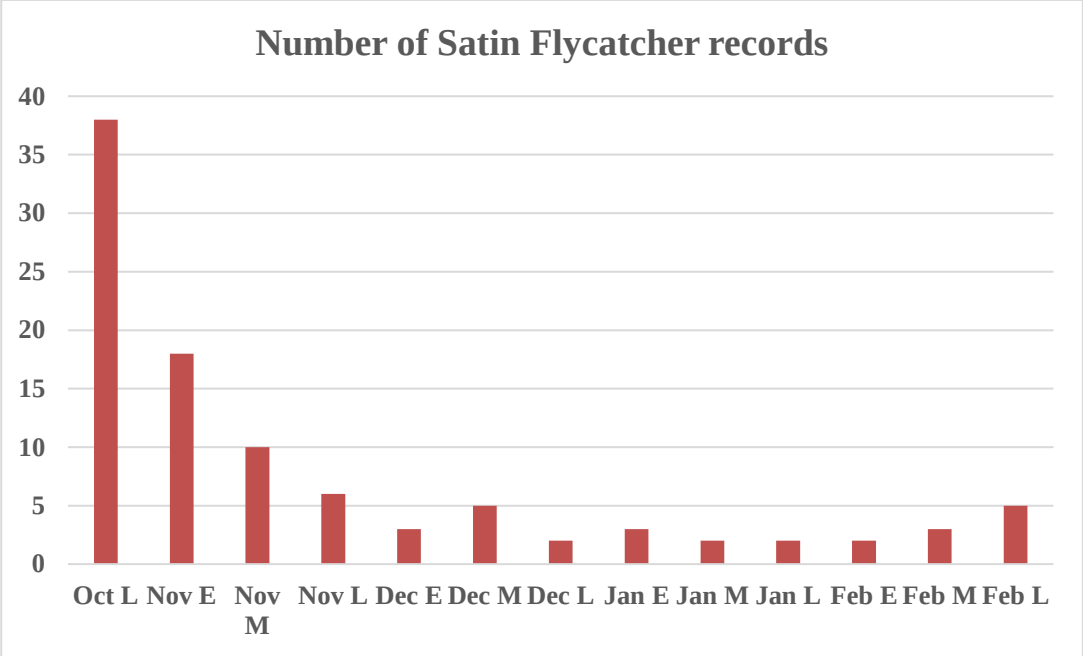


Figure 7. Number of Satin Flycatcher records in woodlands and suburbia during the breeding season in the mountains.

3.2.4. **Rose Robin**

The Rose Robin is a breeding summer migrant in the ranges of the ACT (Taylor and COG 1992; Wilson 1999). During migration the species passes through lowland sites and suburbia with a peak within the period of consideration between late winter and early spring (August to early September: Fig. 8; Veerman 2003). It is largely absent from low-lying areas between October and early March, when the outward migration (as far as northeastern Queensland (Griffioen and Clarke 2002; Higgins and Peter 2002)) begins, although some birds can overwinter in Canberra (Taylor and COG 1992).

In contrast to the other WSF species considered here, there exist only very few Rose Robin records during the breeding season (October to January, young independent by March: Taylor and COG 1992) away from the ranges in the general COG and the GBS records (Fig. 8, Veerman 2003). It is notable, though, that the only observation from Mt Ainslie in that period followed a thunderstorm in late October when the bird was sighted, as were three other WSF species (Table 2). Perhaps the species has a different strategy to coping with adverse weather conditions than the other three WSF species considered here.

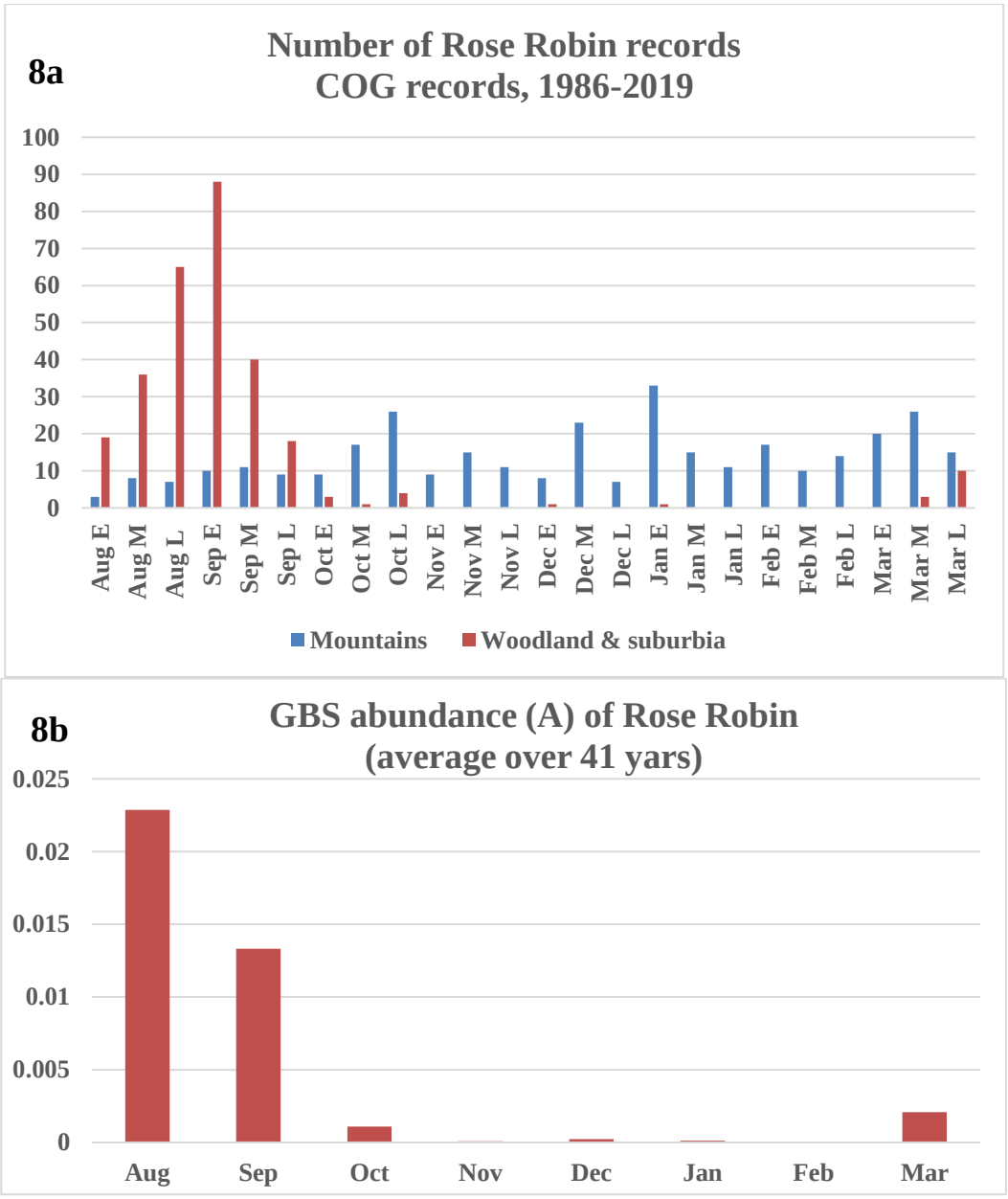


Figure 8. (8a) Seasonal distribution of Rose Robin records in the mountains, woodlands and suburbia and (8b) Abundance (A) in the Garden Bird Survey (GBS).

3.3. Possible origins of the mountain WSF birds at lower altitudes during the breeding season

Birds of species breeding in the tall WSF of the mountains and appearing during the breeding season at lowland sites could have different origins: (1) passage migrants, still moving to more southern breeding areas; (2) birds completing their altitudinal movement in our area with some delay or staying at low altitudes; and (3) 'floaters' driven down from breeding areas by storms.

The different options are discussed below.

3.3.1. Migrants

All four species considered here migrate in a N/S coastal pattern in a band of varying width from breeding to wintering grounds and back (see Griffioen and Clark 2002). Hence, not all

birds we record, at least at the start of the breeding season, will be local ones, but will include individuals still on passage to southern breeding sites. However, birds seen in the midst of the breeding season, would most likely be 'local' birds (see below).

3.3.2. Delayed altitudinal movement

Observations from the Golden Whistler indicate (see Sect 3.2.1.) that some individuals may well stay in lowland areas, as indicated by reported breeding attempts, or delay movement to higher altitudes. There is no current indication that this is the case for birds of the other three WSF species.

3.3.3. Floaters

I suggest that floaters are the most likely main source of the birds that appear during the breeding season at lowland sites. Floaters are defined as 'non-territorial individuals roaming occupied territories awaiting future breeding opportunities' (Githiru *et al.* 2006). It seems populations of most bird species include varying numbers of floaters. Floaters aim to gain a territory and secure a partner, or at least look for mating opportunities. In many species, floaters are mostly unpaired males. They do have a significant impact on the population, either by quickly replacing any disappeared breeder or by contributing to the gene pool via extra-pair copulations. Floaters may occupy sites around the edges of the area the breeding population has settled in. They may even occupy different (lower quality) habitat (Penteriani *et al*. 2011; Lenda *et al*. 2014). Another feature of floaters, important in the context of this article, is that they are more mobile than the breeding birds (Lenda *et al*. 2014).

Two of our common resident species, the Australian Magpie (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) (Carrick 1963) and the Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*) (Rowley 1973) present local examples of species with floaters in the wider population. In both species any missing partner in a breeding territory is quickly replaced from a group-/flock-living pool of non-breeding birds. Replacements, especially of males, can happen within hours of the disappearance of the resident bird, as experimental removal of males and direct observations have shown (Rowley 1973; Jones and Nealson 2003).

3.4. Weather impact on altitudinal movement of floaters

Weather can have major impacts on all aspects of the life history of birds (Mainwaring *et al.* 2021), from even small-scale variations in temperature and rainfall, to storms (*e.g.* Lees and Gilroy 2021), droughts and floods (*e.g*. Theimer *et al.* 2023), to large-scale weather phenomena, such as El Niño and La Niña (*e.g.* Lenz *et al.* 2023) and climate change (*e g.* Sharpe *et al*. 2022). In the context of this discussion, the impact of localised storms is important. Over spring and summer, thunderstorm activity, in particular, seems to trigger movement of some WSF species from the mountains to low altitudes, as the observations from Mt Ainslie indicate (see Sect. 3.1.). Altitudinal migration downhill in response to storms has also been observed in a number of montane tropical birds (Skutch 1969 [in Boyle *et al.* 2010], Boyle *et al.* 2010).

Breeding pairs which have already invested in a brood (eggs, young) are more likely to try to sit out a storm to safeguard their brood, while floaters, in general considered to be more mobile, have no such ties and are far more likely to avoid the impact of storms by moving to lower altitudes. Before the breeding season is well-advanced, while breeding opportunities may still arise, floaters would benefit from returning to the breeding population in the mountains after the storms. Once the breeding season is advanced, storms

may cause them to disperse and not return to the site of the breeding population. The restlessness of the birds observed at Mt Ainslie would support such a proposition, along with the fact that observations of WSF species did not extend beyond December (see Table 3).

It is interesting that the Rose Robin is far less likely than the other three species to be recorded at low altitudes during the breeding season; only very few observations from woodlands and suburbia are available (Table 2, Fig. 8). For breeding it prefers the dense and diverse low understorey vegetation in gullies and slopes (Higgins and Peter 2002; Cooper et al. 2020). This habitat may enable the species to better withstand the impacts of storms, and hence floaters can stay in the mountains. (Note, the only observation over the breeding season at Mt Ainslie was after a storm.)

4. Conclusions

This article has documented that some species breeding in the tall WSF mountains of the Canberra region (Golden Whistler, Rufous Fantail, Satin Flycatcher, Rose Robin) can also occur at low-altitude sites during their breeding season, albeit in low numbers. The number of out-of-season records in the COG database (1986 -2019) was highest for the Golden Whistler (328 records), lower but similar for Rufous Fantail (109) and Satin Flycatcher (99) and lowest for the Rose Robin (13) (see Figs. 2, 4, 7 and 8a).

The source of these birds may be: (a) passage migrants moving through our area to breeding sites further south (while local birds have already commenced breeding); (b) delayed altitudinal movement from low-altitude overwintering sites to the breeding grounds in the mountains, with some evidence only for the Golden Whistler; and (c) most significantly, floaters (with no territory or partner of their own, but looking for breeding and at least mating opportunities among the breeding population) responding to severe weather events (*e.g.* thunderstorms) by moving temporarily to lower altitudes. The distance over which floaters may move to avoid weather impact is unknown. Breeding birds with eggs or young in the nest would be more likely to 'weather' any storms and stay in the mountains.

The differences in the number of out-of-season records between the species may reflect differences in the size of the breeding populations, the number of floaters and the ability of a species in coping with adverse weather effects.

It will be difficult to obtain more direct evidence for the scenarios outlined here.

The records have also added more detail about the length of the breeding season of these four species in the local mountains.

Acknowledgements

The Canberra Ornithologists Group made records from its database available and provided Abundance values from its Garden Bird Survey. I am grateful to A.O. Nicholls and Duncan McCaskill for facilitating data access. I have greatly appreciated the many helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article from Kevin Windle, Leo Joseph, Geoffrey Dabb and Kim Farley. Information to specific questions was received from Barbara Allan, Steve Read, Kim Farley and Nicki Taws. My thanks go to all who assisted in producing this article.

References

Allan, B. (2019) The Canberra Blitz 2018. *Canberra Bird Notes* 44: 169-187.

Australian Bird Study Association [ABSA] (2019) Bird in the Hand, 2nd. Edition. Compiled by J Hardy. *Satin Flycatcher*. *Info.@absa.asu.au*

Boles, W., Hoyo, J. del, Christie, D.A. and Collar, N. (2020). Rufous Fantail (*Rhipidura rufifrons*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World* (Billerman, S.M., Keeney, B.K., Rodewald, P.G. and Schulenberg, T. S., Eds.). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.

Boyle, W.A., Norris, D.R. and Guglielmo, C.G. (2010) Storms drive altitudinal migration in a tropical bird. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 277: 2511-2519.

Canberra Ornithologists Group (2012) *COG's Area of Interest.* https://canberrabirds.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/COG-AOI-map-v2.pdf (visited 30 October 2023)

Carrick, R. (1963). Social and ecological factors in population regulation of the Australian Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*. 740-753. *Proceedings of the XVI International Congress of Zoology*. Vol. 3. 16th International Congress of Zoology, Washington, D.C.

Cooper, R.M. and McAllan, I.A.W. (1999) *A guide to bird habitats in New South Wales.* New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc., Sydney.

Cooper, R.M., McAllan, I.A.W., Brandis C.C.P. and Curtis, B.R. (2020) *An atlas of the birds of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.* Vol. 3 *Eastern Spinebill to Greenfinch*. New South Wales Bird Atlassers Inc., Woolgoolga.

Frith, H.J. (ed.) (1976) *Birds in the Australian High Country.* Angus & Robertson Publishers.

Githiru, M., Lens, L., Bennun, L.A. and Perrins, C. (2006) Experimental evidence of 'floaters' in two isolated populations of an Afrotropical forest bird. *Ostrich* 77: 28-35.

Gregory, P. (2020). Satin Flycatcher (*Myiagra cyanoleuca*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World* (Hoyo, J. del, Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D. A. and Juana, E. de, Eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA.

Griffioen, P.A. and Clarke, M.F. (2002) Large-scale bird-movement patterns evident in eastern Australian atlas data. *Emu* 102: 99-125.

Hermes, N. (2017) *A photographic field guide to the birds of the Australian High Country.* John Beaufort Publishing, Oxford.

Higgins, P.J. and Peter, J.M. (2002) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctica birds.* Vol. 6: *Pardalotes to Shrike-thrushes*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Cowling, S.J. (2006) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctica birds.* Vol. 7: *Boatbill to Starlings.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Jones, D.N. and Nealson, T. (2003) Management of aggressive Australian magpies by translocation. *Wildlife Research* 30: 167-177.

Lees, A. and Gilroy, J. (2021) *Vagrancy in birds.* Christopher Helm, London.

Lenda, M., Maciusik, B. and Skórka (2012) The evolutionary, ecological and behavioural consequences of the presence of floaters in bird populations. *North-western Journal of Zoology* 8: 394-408.

Lenz, M., Clark, J. and Nicholls, A.O. (2023) Dynamics of Eurasian Coot populations and their response to La Niña events on two Canberra urban ponds. *Canberra Bird Notes* 48:35-49.

Mainwaring, M.C., Nord, A. and Sharp, S.P. (2021) Editorial: The impact of weather on the behavior and ecology of birds. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 9: 1-4.

Penteriani, V., Ferrer, M. and Delgado, M.M. (2011) Floater strategies and dynamics in birds, and their importance in conservation biology: towards an understanding of nonbreeders in avian populations. *Animal Conservation* 14: 233-241.

Purchase, D. and Wilson, S. (1999) Some observations on the altitudinal migration of Golden Whistlers in the ACT. *Canberra Bird Notes* 24: 1-6.

Rowley, I. (1973) The comparative ecology of Australian corvids. II. Social organisation and behaviour. *CSIRO Wildlife Research* 18: 25-65.

Sharpe, L.L., Prober, S.M. and Gardner, J.L. (2022) In the hot seat: Behavioral change and old-growth trees underpin an Australian songbird's response to extreme heat. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 10: 813567. doi:10.3389/fevo.2022.813567

Skutch, A.F. (1969) *Life histories of central American birds III: families Cottingidae, Pipridae, Formicariidae, Furnariidae, Dendrocolaptidae, and Picidae.* Berkeley, CA: Pacific Coast Avifauna Number 35, Cooper Ornithological Society [quoted in Boyle *et. al.* 2010].

Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992) *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory - an atlas*. Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority, Canberra.

Theimer, T.C., Sogge, M.K., Cardinal. S.N., Durst, S.L. and Paxton, E.H. (2023) Extreme drought alters frequency and reproductive success of floaters in Willow Flycatchers. *The Auk* 135: 647-656.

Veerman, P. A. (2003) *Canberra Birds: A report on the first 21 years of the Garden bird survey.* Self-published, Canberra.

Accepted 2 November 2023

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 96-116

A HYBRID *PHYLIDONYRIS* HONEYEATER HAS PRODUCED YOUNG INTERMITTENTLY BETWEEN 2016 AND 2023 AT A SITE IN CANBERRA

GEOFFREY DABB

gdabb@iinet.net.au

Abstract: *This article continues the story of a hybrid* Phylidonyris *honeyeater (*P. novaehollandiae x P. niger*) in a Canberra nature reserve over a period of eight years. Particular attention is given to evidence of apparently successful breeding attempts by the hybrid, and plumage pattern and eye colour of presumed hybrids. Consideration of all those matters can be greatly advanced by reference to photographs, so relevant graphic material is presented here in a set of folios comprising some 50 illustrations. Photos of fledglings and older immature individuals are also presented and discussed.*

Abbreviations:

NHH – New Holland Honeyeater; WCH – White-cheeked Honeyeater; H1 – an apparent hybrid honeyeater observed over a period of 8 years 2016-2023; H2 – an apparent second hybrid observed in July 2021; Hq – an unusual honeyeater with possible hybrid features seen in August 2019; JWNR – Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve. Some of the observers mentioned by initials: Steve Wallace (SW2), Shorty Westlin (SW1), Christine Darwood (CD), Geoffrey Dabb (author, GD).

Arrangement of folios:

A - The JWNR site
B - Differences between H1 and typical NHH
C - H1 in the 2019 breeding season
D - July 2021 and appearance of H2
E - Detail of head features of H1
F - Detail of head features of H2
G - Features of an immature NHH, and of Hq
J - Fledglings of 2016
K - Fledglings of 2019
L, M, N - Fledglings of 2023

1. Background

In 2016 this journal published a report about - (a) a very unusual record of a White-cheeked Honeyeater in the Canberra area; (b) the subsequent appearance of a hybrid honeyeater (White-cheeked x New Holland); and (c) the mating of the hybrid with a New Holland Honeyeater, and feeding of fledglings by the mixed pair (Dabb 2016). For the purpose of this article, it is assumed readers will have access to that 2016 report. (Available at https://canberrabirds.org.au/wp-content/canberra-bird-notes/CBN-41-3-23-Jan.pdf). The 2016 illustrations remain relevant but are not reproduced here.

Since the 2016 observations, the eBird online recording platform has made provision for records of hybrids of the species involved here. Records have been accepted from sites in Brisbane, in 2017 and 2018, and Perth, June 2019 (Groom 2019). The Canberra hybrid, apparently the same individual as in 2016 (referred to here as H1), has been reported frequently but intermittently, from the first sighting to the present time.

A large number of relevant photos is available online at the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library website. These can be filtered under various headings, the most useful for present purposes being dates and locations. Three photos are from Western Australia, seven from Queensland, and 107 from the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The ACT photos are probably of a single individual (H1), except for a small number depicting its presumed descendants, and a few NHH photos wrongly classified. Of the 107 photos, about half are from 2016-2020, and half since 1 Jan 2021.

In its accounts for the parent species (WCH and NHH), the online Cornell Lab *Birds of the World* has a section on 'Hybridization'. This does not offer new information but gives a reference to the accumulated eBird contributions relating to hybrid observations and photos. https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/nehhon2/cur/introduction#hybrid

2. The Jerrabomberra Site ('JWNR site')

The site is in the Canberra area of the ACT, within a reserve known as Jerrabomberra Wetlands Nature Reserve (Folia A). The significant part of the reserve for present purposes includes a low elevation in a bend of Jerrabomberra Creek. Aerial photography from 1977, before creation of the nature reserve, shows some riverine vegetation but mainly bare earth or low grassy cover within the creek bend (Fig. A1). That area has since been planted with a variety of trees and shrubs, including some out-of-area native species. Public access has been encouraged by construction of a sealed path that encircles Lake Burley Griffin, much used by cyclists, strollers and joggers. In addition, separate walking paths have been constructed through the site, forming a 'woodland' walk.

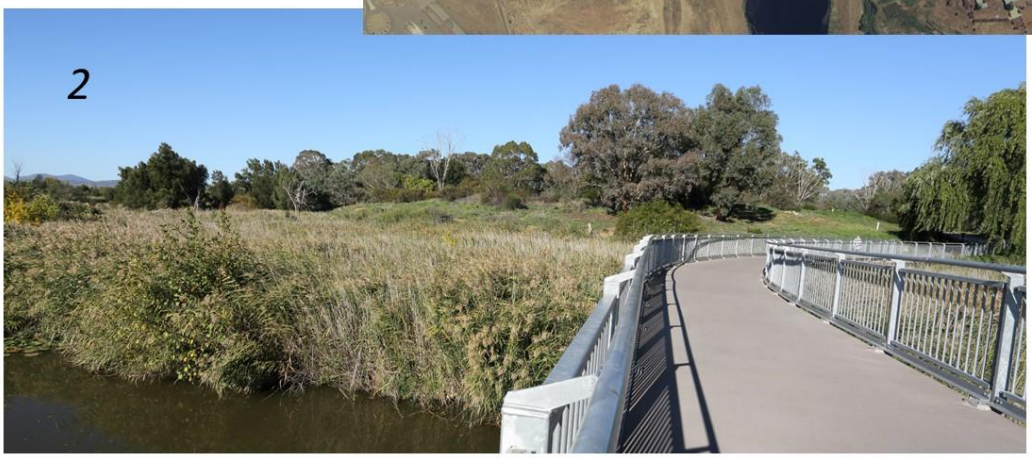
The nature reserve, including the woodland precinct, is much visited by observers and photographers of birds. As a result, bird life of the area is quite closely monitored, with many observations and photographs placed on the online 'eBird' recording system.

Within the relevant area, New Holland Honeyeaters, and H1 in particular, have shown a preference for (perhaps rather 'dependence on') nectar-feeding on the grevillea plantings. It is likely that periods of little or no flowering cause these honeyeaters to seek food elsewhere, probably some distance away, as the site is usually an island of attractive foraging habitat, with few similar food opportunities nearby. Another factor encouraging use of the site by smaller honeyeaters is abundant insect life, particular small flying insects, given the waterlogged reedbeds and soggy margins of Jerrabomberra Creek. WCHs and NHHs include a high proportion of insects in their diet (Recher 1977).

On the other hand, the site is also home to Red Wattlebirds *Anthochaera carunculata*, which behave aggressively towards smaller honeyeaters.

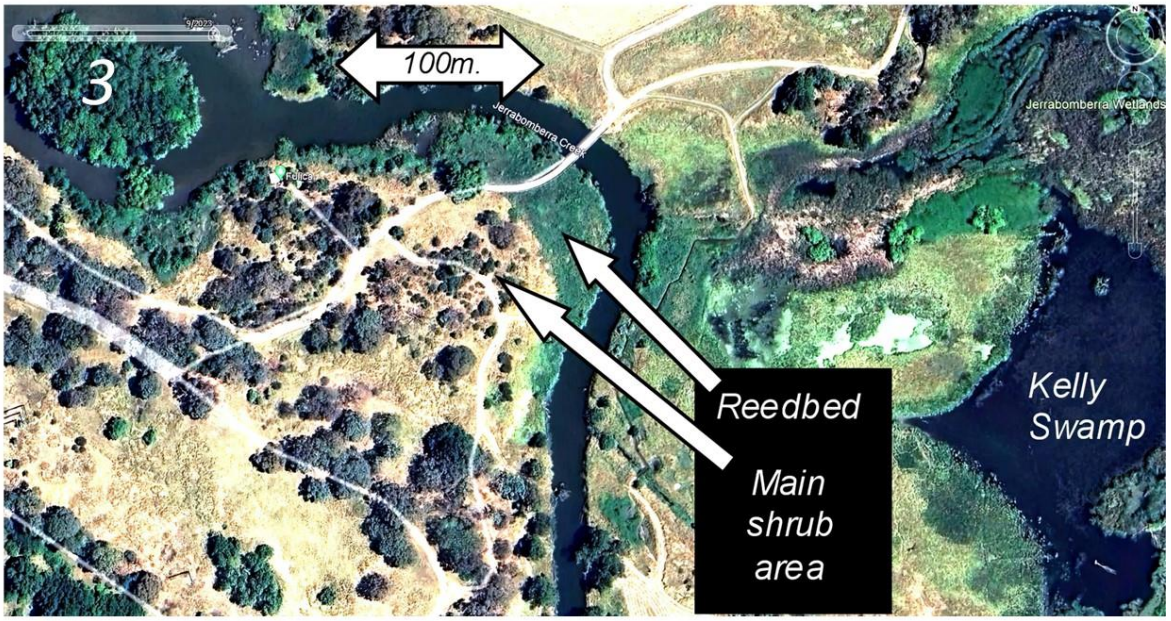
The following are approximate periods when H1 appears to have been either unnoticed or absent from the site, the list being compiled by reference to eBird records and other information.

Folio A. The site. A1 is from an aerial photo in February 1977, and shows the area at a point in time between the dairy farm era and the creation of the nature reserve. In the area shown there would have been very little native tree or shrub vegetation.



A2. A view in April 2020 of the bridge, part of the reedbed, and the shrubby elevated area.

A3, from a Google Earth view of the site in a drying period, September 2023. Shown are walking paths, and the major cycling and walking path crossing the bridge over Jerrabomberra Creek.



3. Chronology of records

3.1. Periods H1 not recorded at Jerra site, after December 2016 (possible absences?)

Nov 2017 > Jan 2018 (3 months)
Feb 2019 > July 2019 (6 Months)
Jan 2020 > March 2020 (3 months)
Nov 2020 > Dec 2020 (2 months)
Jan 2022 > Aug 2022 (8 months)
Jan 2023 > Feb 2023 (2 months)

3.2. A summary chronology of relevant events 2015/2016 is as follows:

10 Dec 2015. First report at JWNR of White-cheeked Honeyeater (WCH). (Feeding on blossom 'in tree near car park off Dairy Road' (eBird). The nearest place to JWNR where WCH are regularly reported is Morton National Park on the eastern side of the coast range, at a distance of about 100km.)

Feb 2016. Presumed young hybrid H1 photographed.

Sep 2016. WCH and hybrid H1 photographed.

Oct-Dec 2016. Successful nesting by hybrid H1, mated with NHH, in reedbed near bridge. Fledglings photographed. (See Dabb 2016)

3.3. The period 2017-2023

An attempt is made here to trace H1's story since the end of 2016. Some of the many observers who have their own records might be able to add to this account.

2017

In May, H1 seen gathering nest material (later videoed by SW2). On 17 Aug H1 was photographed sitting tight on a nest about 0.5m above ground in a low grevillea (CD, SW1, SW2). The nest attempt failed, possibly because it was very close to a path used by strollers and joggers, sometimes cyclists.

2018

H1 present in area for most of year. No relevant breeding information. 23 July: Archer Callaway reported an apparent WCH/NHH hybrid in grevillea at Narrabundah College, 2.5 km from JWNR site, *the only record of such a hybrid in ACT outside JWNR.*

2019

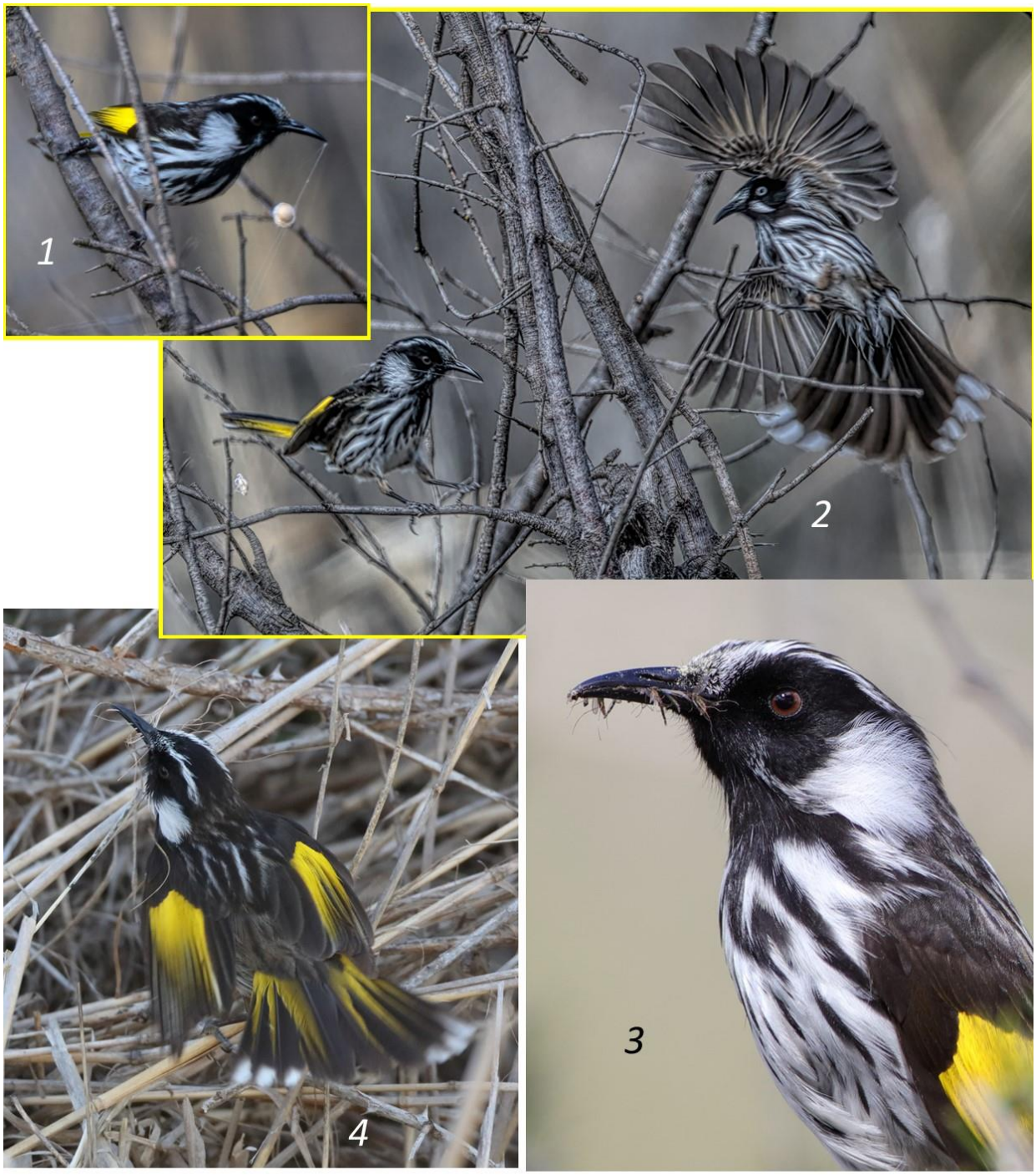
23 Aug, an unusual honeyeater (Hq) appeared and was photographed. This showed a combination of features calling for comparison with H2 of Jul 2021 (Folio G3, G4). No firm opinion is offered on the provenance of this individual. A similar individual (Peter Higgins photo, 7 Jul 2020) is classified in Macaulay Library as a hybrid.

Photos relating to breeding activity are at Folio C. 9 Sep, H1 seen carrying beak-full of small insects. 20 Sep, H1 photographed in reedbed with spider egg sac, near a NHH, being presumed mate. 22 Sep, a fledgling was seen in reedbird near the 2016 nesting. H1 and a NHH seen entering and leaving reeds. 11 Oct, fledgling seen nearby, with H1. Photos obtained of early fledglings (Folio J).

5, 6 Nov, H1 seen with nest material, suggesting a second nesting attempt in that season.

Folio B

Differences between H1 (3 - 5) and typical NHH (1 - 2). Continuous broad crown stripes; no malar plumes; small, mainly black beard; large fan plumes; coloured iris. Photos 3 and 4 are from September 2023.



Folio C. Scenes from 2019. H1 appears in each of these photos. 1 - 20 Sept, collecting egg sac; 2 - same day, probable breeding pair together on bare branches in reedbed, H1 carrying fragment of spider web; 3 - H1 carrying food, 9 Sept 2019; 4 - gathering nest material, 6 November . (Also seen with spider web, 5 Nov. This seems to be out of sequence as a matter of breeding procedure, but may represent a second nesting attempt.)

Folio D. July 2021. Fig. E1 shows H1 with possible second generation hybrid, H2.
A few seconds later there was a partly obscured view of some food-passing between H1 and H2 (inset). Figs. E2 - E4 are further views of H2.

Folio E

The distinctive head plumage of H1. Note large fan plumes and a diffuse curve of small white feathers, longer at the lower or posterior end. These overlap the fan and suggest a vestigial malar tuft. Compare H2, Folio F. For a time comparison, 1 and 4 are from 2016, 7 from 2017, others from September 2023.

15 Nov, photos by Deb and Rod Ralph near Cygnus Hide, of apparently young honeyeater lacking malar plumes. Further photos 17 December, possibly of same bird (Folio J).

2020

From eBird: 7 Sep - photos by Adrian Brooks, interpreted, plausibly, as NHH 'attempting to mate' with hybrid. Under 'New Holland Honeyeater', same observer, same day: '5 … Possible mixed family group with hybrid with two fledged young. Adults returned to bush on several occasions with food from reed bed.'

2021

From eBird: 2 July, first report, by Archer Callaway, with photos, of 'two hybrids' (being H1 and H2). Similar, less detailed, reports followed. The two birds were present until at least 15 Jul, in company with the usual small population of NHHs (up to 5 individuals).
5 & 15 Jul: A series of photos by GD illustrate the 'two hybrids' (Folios D, F). Observed in the field, New Holland Honeyeaters show considerable size variation. On average, males are only slightly larger than females. ('(F)emales slightly smaller, difference appreciable between members of some mated pairs, in direct comparison.' – HANZAB 2001). However, there is considerable weight variation within each gender (HANZAB). H2 was appreciably larger than H1.

2022

H1 absent or inconspicuous for most of year. Only 5 eBird reports, Oct-Dec. No breeding information.

2023

1 Sep. Ellie & Louise Summerhayes submitted to eBird a photo of H1 carrying food (Folio K). Following up that report, observers found H1 and a NHH repeatedly carrying food into the base of an acacia clump, a few metres from the nest reported in 2017. SW1 obtained a photo of a dependent young deep in the foliage (Fig. L2). H1 was seen to feed the young. In a grevillea overhung by the acacia, a vacated nest was found, partly damaged, suggesting nest predation that might have been survived by the single young. The nest is to be lodged with Australian National Wildlife Collection.

By 16 September the fledgling was capable of flight beyond the protective acacia, SW1 obtaining further photos. On 22 Sep, the young was foraging by itself, attended by H1. 'A couple of times the young hung upside down', at one point H1 holding a toe (Fig. M1). (It might be speculated that H1 was encouraging the fledgling to move away from human presence, previously observed behaviour by parent birds with dependent young.)

On 4 Oct, apparently indicating an attempt at a second brood, H1 was noticed carrying nest material (Alastair Smith). On 19 Nov it was photographed carrying food, several small insects at one time (SW1). For 25 and 26 Nov, there are eBird reports of a 'recently fledged young' near the grevilleas. On 2 December, SW1 photographed two fledglings of similar age at that location. The parentage of those is not known, but their unusual plumage features are shown at Folio N.

4. A point about terminology

In relation to the NHH, Australian authors use the adjective 'malar' in referring to the distinctive 'moustachial' plumes or tufts. That usage has been questioned because in dictionary definitions 'malar' refers to the cheek. For example -

> **malar** … *adjective* 1. Of or relating to the cheekbone or cheek. – *noun* 2. Also, **malar bone**. The cheek-bone. [New Latin *malaris*, from Latin *mala* cheekbone, cheek] (Macquarie)

See also https://www.omlet.us/guide/finches_and_canaries/pet_finches/anatomy/
The issue whether 'malar' is a useful term has been addressed online by David Sibley, from the viewpoint of a field guide author:
https://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/03/what-is-the-submoustachial/
https://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/03/a-head-feather-survey/

A diagram in HANZAB vol 1A, p. 31 shows a 'malar area' below the eye, distinct from and in front of an indicated 'moustachial stripe'. The term is not explained in the glossary.

Some clarification seems needed because a different feature, the 'white cheek' of the WCH, and the corresponding feature of the NHH, are described by Australian writers as a 'cheek-patch'. In the plumages sections in HANZAB this is 'a prominent tuft of white feathers on sides of neck' (NHH), or 'large white triangular cheek-patch … which fans out and covers most of sides of neck and sides of throat' (WCH). Here 'fan' is used for that feature, and 'malar', as used by Australian authorities, to describe the moustachial plumes or tufts of the NHH. The NHH has both malar plumes or tufts, and relatively small (cheek) fans. The WCH has large fans which usually extend beyond what might be regarded as a 'cheek'.

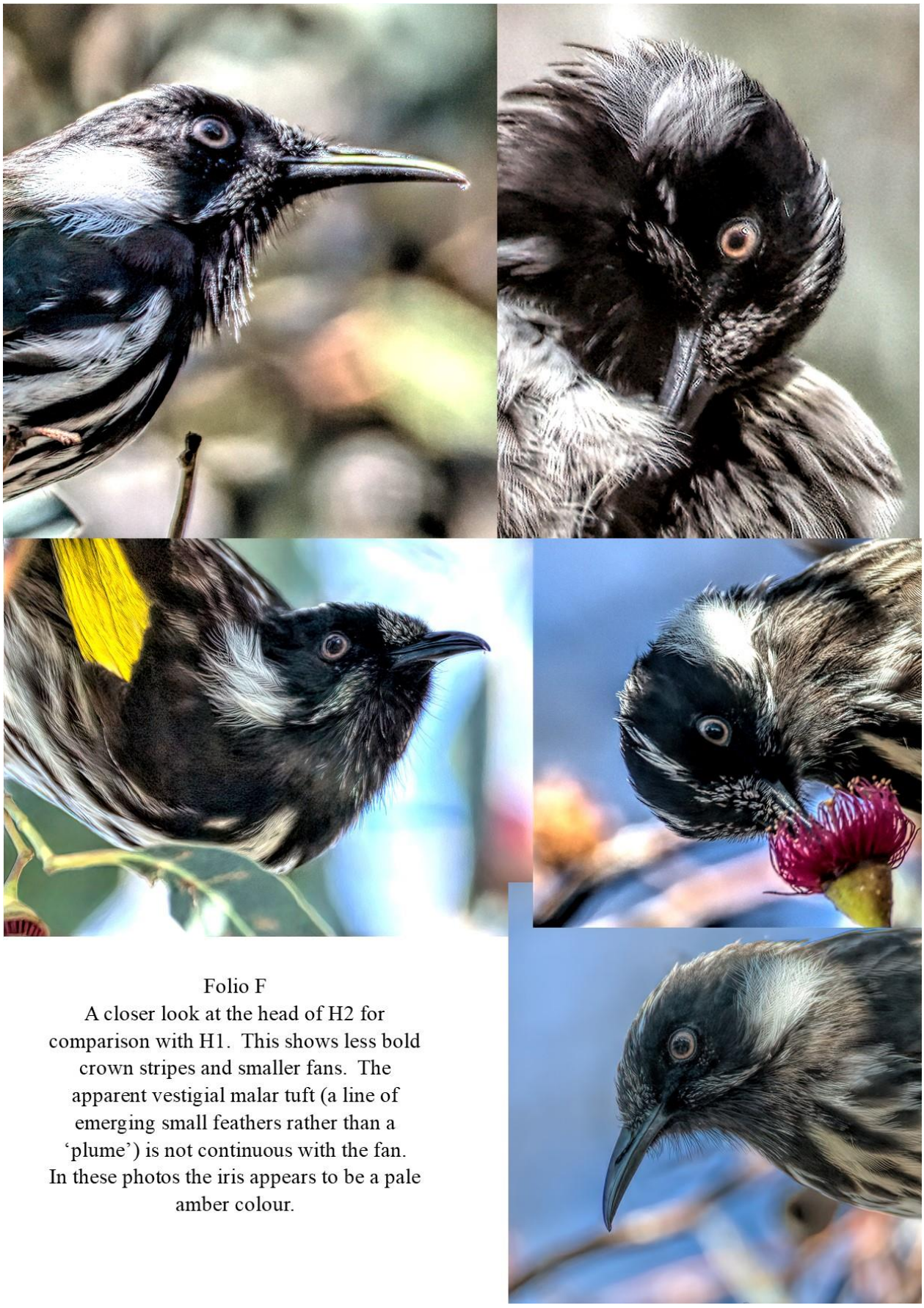
5. Comparison of plumages and iris colours

In the holdings of the Macaulay Library, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, there are, as at 16 Oct 2023, 11,446 photos of the New Holland Honeyeater. These are a significant reference for present purposes, although covering five subspecies, from different parts of Australia. The size and shape of patches of white feathers on the head and throat varies considerably between individuals of the one subspecies. Variation is to be expected, according to age, wear and the plumage cycle.

The National Photographic Index 'Honeyeaters' volume (Longmore 1991) gives two examples of 'immature' NHHs (pages 260, 263). They are similar, each with substantial yellow in the gape. Both show well-developed malar tufts, and an insignificant fan. That combination of features (yellow gape and malar tufts) for young NHHs is confirmed by photos in the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library (e.g. Paul Brooks 17 Nov 2019). https://search.macaulaylibrary.org/catalog?taxonCode=nehhon2&mediaType=photo&sort=rating_rank_desc

Julie Clark's photos of a young NHH (ANBG, 9 May 2023, Figs, G1&2) show a bird with a mid-grey iris but no yellow gape. It is perhaps 3 or 4 months old. Its malar plumes could be fully grown. Its fan plumes are of modest size although larger than those of some adult NHHs (as shown in ACT photos, Macaulay Library).

The head plumage and iris of H1 are quite different from a typical NHH (Folio B). The head plumage and iris of H2 (Folio F) are closer to a typical NHH, but could reasonably be regarded as consistent with a WCH/NHH hybrid (if so, possibly a sibling of H1) or with a second-generation hybrid (if so, possibly progeny of H1). If progeny of H1, H2 could be the result of the known successful nestings of H1 in 2016 or 2019, or of an unknown nesting.



Folio F
A closer look at the head of H2 for comparison with H1. This shows less bold crown stripes and smaller fans. The apparent vestigial malar tuft (a line of emerging small feathers rather than a 'plume') is not continuous with the fan. In these photos the iris appears to be a pale amber colour.

Folio G

1-2: Young NHH, ANBG, 9 May 2023 (Julie Clark).

3-4: Unusual NHH (Hq), 23 Aug 2019.

5: 'H2', July 2021, for comparison.

The distinctive features of H2 mentioned here were noticed and photographed in the field by Archer Callaway for his initial report of the bird on 2 July 2021. https://ebird.org/australia/checklist/S91096801

The individual labelled Hq is mentioned here as of possible relevance to the hybrid question (August 2019, Folio F). Its malar tufts consist of bristles that are quite short, but longer than those of H2. The crown stripes have a small break. The fan plume is large, the lower part extending to almost below the eye (something not seen in NHH images) leaving a small space before the malar tuft. The iris is of a pale honey colour. This individual has something in common with H2, but is certainly not the same bird. The features mentioned might be indications of some *P. niger* intrusion in its ancestry. If that is not so, the bird is to be regarded as an unusual type of NHH.

A photo one year later (Peter Higgins, 7 Jul 2020, in Macaulay Library as a 'hybrid', ML262592991) could be the same bird as Hq, with cream iris, fan plume extending under eye.

It might be added here that the photo of the Queensland hybrid in the Macaulay Library shows a close resemblance to H1 (Stephen Murray, 11 Mar 2018, ML89252391).

A recent article in *Ibis* (Corbett *et al.* 2023) is a comprehensive overview of what is known about iris colours of birds, 'a trait little studied compared with plumage coloration'. The two honeyeaters considered here are examples of strikingly different eye colours in two closely related species. The gene flow implications of the unusual iris colour of H1 are likely to remain unknown for some time, given that 'the genetic mechanisms affecting iris coloration have been under-studied and remain largely unknown in wild species'.

5.1. Plumages of fledglings

The recording of dependent young honeyeaters in 2016, 2019 and 2023 raises the question whether any show evidence of hybrid parentage. It seems obvious that a chick that is genetically ¾ NHH would be close in its appearance to a typical NHH of that age, although probably not identical.

Lack of clear photos of fledglings make it difficult to determine what is 'typical' at an early age. The appearance of a (probable) second generation hybrid adult (H2) has provided one example of a mature bird of (probably) such ancestry.

Spring of 2016 was a successful breeding period at the site, with at least 3 breeding pairs NHH/NHH or NHH/hybrid. The first fledglings seen, in October (Folio J), must have been of NHH/NHH parentage. A later brood was attended by a NHH/hybrid pair. In the photos here of juveniles from 2019 (Folio K), no malar tufts are evident, although the fan is developing. (Note especially Figs. 3 and 4, where there is only a trace of a remaining yellow gape, and 5, where there is none.) As shown here by other photos, it seems that the malar tuft develops early in birds of NHH/NHH parentage. This is some evidence that the fledglings shown in Folio K, with little or no malar tuft, are of partly hybrid parentage.

A contrast is presented by the fledgling photographed in September 2023 (Folios L and M). This shows a very early developing malar tuft. The chick in M1a, probably about 3 weeks after fledging, has a malar tuft but bare skin around the ear. In M2 and M3, 3 weeks later, the tuft is of larger extent than in many adult NHHs. As this individual is known to be of

hybrid parentage, a reasonable conclusion is that a consistent pattern is not to be expected in later hybrid generations. The plumage features of the head and neck (plumes, crown stripes, beard) might develop differently in different individuals according to gene heritage.

Folio N shows a possible second brood of H1 in 2023. If both fledglings are of the one brood, the differences between them will be another example of hybrid variability.

6. The remarkable reproductive drive of H1

The most likely hypothesis, as outlined in these two papers is that, during a brief period at the site, the WCH parent of H1 mated with a NHH. H1 left the nest in spring/summer 2015/2016. A less likely hypothesis is that H1 was a young hybrid, born elsewhere, that arrived at the site with, or at about the same time as, an adult WCH.

As mentioned in Dabb 2016, H1 is taken to be a female by reason of its nest building (HANZAB 2001), a conclusion reinforced by its further reproductive career. As to age, re-trap information (HANZAB, ABBBS) indicates that only a small percentage of individuals of both parent species survive to 8 years. There are some notable exceptions. A NHH in South Australia was re-trapped after 14 years 5 months, and a WCH in Western Australia was re-trapped after 12 years 1 month (ABBBS).

By October 2016 H1 mated with a NHH and produced two young. As indicated by visits to nest and young, H1 was the more active feeder of nestlings and fledglings. H1 built the 2017 nest, and apparently laid at least one egg in it. H1 was the more active feeder of young in 2019. H1 probably attempted a second nest in that year. In 2023, H1 was the more active feeder and attendant of the single young.

In November 2023, H1 was seen again carrying food, probably for a second brood that spring (Folio N).

The Jerra site has a recently human-created environment, like the Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) and the shrubby gardens of Canberra residences. All those can attract NHHs, particularly ANBG, which has a profusion of assorted banksia and grevillea plantings. Unlike the well-watered and well-maintained ANBG, the condition of the shrub growth of the JWNR site has deteriorated somewhat over recent years. Over time, it has attracted fewer honeyeaters.

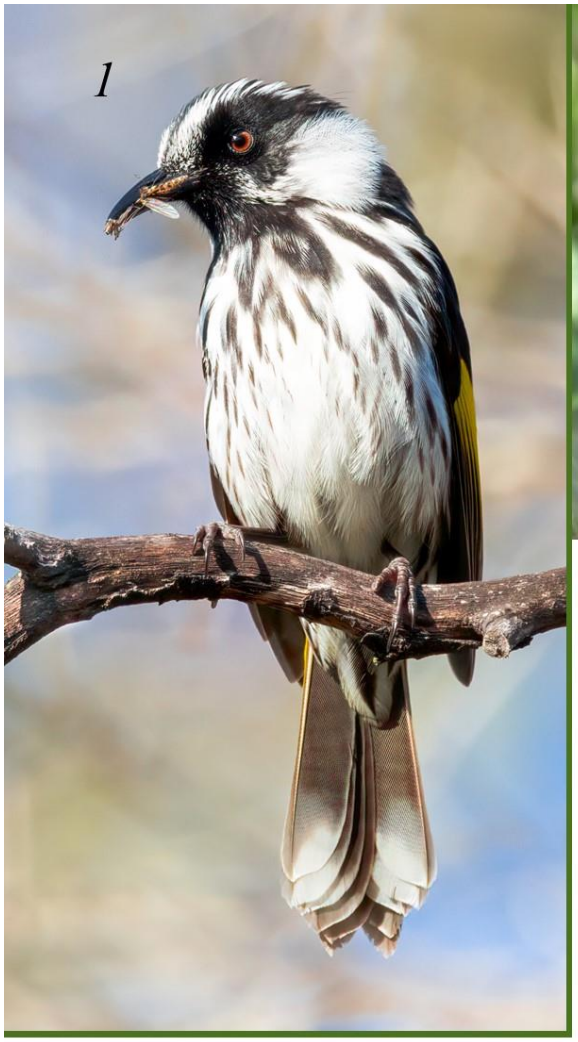
According to eBird data, eight or more NHHs were recorded in the ‘woodland loop hotspot’ on six occasions in 2017 and 2018, but that number has not been reached subsequently. Since 2019, no more than 4 have been recorded on any one occasion except for ‘mixed group’ September 2020 and one day in September 2023 (6 on 16 Sep). H1’s persistent breeding attempts with a NHH partner are the more surprising because they are taking place within a shrinking NHH community. It is not known whether H1’s breeding attempts were all with a single NHH partner or with two or more different partners.

Folio J. Left, two photos from October 2016, almost certainly the result of a NHH/NHH breeding, before the H2 young (below) appeared.

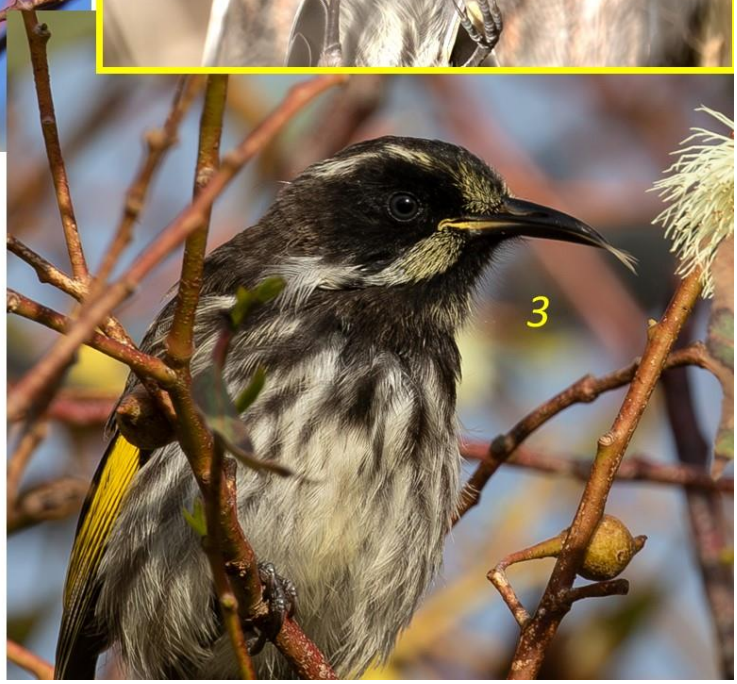
Centre, early-stage fledglings November 2016, seen to be fed by H1. They are sheltering in blackberries and boxthorn within the reedbed.

Left, a later-stage fledgling at the site, on 2 December. Parentage of this bird is unknown.

Folio K. From the 2019 breeding season. 1 - 29 Sept; 2 - 11 Oct; 3 & 4 - 15 Nov; 5 - 17 Dec. It is possible, but not certain, that Figs. 3 - 5 show the same bird(s) as in 1 and 2, or closely related ones. 3 - 5 were photographed by Deb and Rod Ralph in flowering shrubs about 400m east of the nesting area where 1 and 2 were photographed, on the other side of Kelly Swamp. See discussion about plumages of fledglings.



Folio L
September 2023. 1 - Photo by Ellie Summerhayes, 1 September, H1 carrying food. Other photos by SW1. 2 - 8 September, fledgling sheltering in base of clump of *Acacia pravissima* where fed by H1 and a NHH. 3 - 16 September, fledgling has moved to different shrub. 4 - fledgling on 22 September.



Folio M.
Photos by SW1, 2023.
1 - 22 September, fledgling is able to forage by itself, attended by H1. Here the fledgling, hanging upside down, is apparently helped by H1 (holding foot) to go on its way.
2 - 13 Oct. 3 - 14 Oct

Folio N - Photos at the grevilleas by SW1 of two fledglings, 2 Dec 2023. They appear to be same age, with yellow gape and small patch of bare skin under eye. Note different development of malar tuft and lateral crown stripe. Parentage is not known but timing fits earlier food-carrying by H1 which was recorded in area on the day.

Acknowledgments

This paper contains personal observations but relies heavily on contributions from a number of other observers and photographers. Shorty Westlin drew attention to the first appearance of H1. His later regular visits to the site gathered information about nesting, and emergence of juveniles, that, without his remarkable efforts, would not have become available. Archer Callaway's well-known alertness led to the discovery of the 'two hybrids' in 2021. Other valuable contributions were from Julie Clark, Steve Wallace, Christine Darwood, Deb and Rod Ralph, Alastair Smith (a regular surveyor of the whole of JWNR), and Ellie and Louise Summerhayes. Kim Farley (ACT eBird reviewer) and Michael Lenz provided support, suggestions and encouragement. Leo Joseph and Harry Recher gave helpful comments on an early draft.

References

ABBBS database https://www.dcceew.gov.au/science-research/bird-bat-banding/banding-data/search-abbbs-database

Corbett, E.C., Brumfield, R.T. and Faircloth, B.C. (2023) The mechanistic, genetic and evolutionary causes of bird eye colour variation. *Ibis* 165: doi: 10.1111/ibi.13276

Cornell Lab *Birds of the World* (2023) https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/nehhon2/cur/introduction#hybrid

Cosgrove, M. (2014) *Photographic Guide to Native Plants of the Australian Capital Territory*. Meadow Argus.

Dabb, G.P.M. (2016) The observing of a first generation hybrid honeyeater, and the appearance of second generation hybrids' *Canberra Bird Notes* 41: 206-217.

eBird species maps https://ebird.org/map

Groom, G.N. (2019) A photographic record of a possible New Holland *Honeyeater Phylidonyris novaehollandiae longirostris* x White-cheeked Honeyeater *P. niger gouldii* hybrid. *Australian Field Ornithology* 36: 154-157.

Higgins, P.J., Peter J.M., and Steele, W.K. (Senior Eds.) (2001) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 5. *Tyrant-Flycatchers to Chats.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne. ('HANZAB')

Longmore, W. (1991) *Honeyeaters and their Allies of Australia.* Collins Angus & Robertson, North Ryde.

Macquarie Dictionary 4th ed. (2005). Macquarie University, NSW.

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (Co-ordinators) (1990) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Vol. 1A, *Ratites to Petrels*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne. (The explanatory introduction in this volume is relevant to the 'malar' issue.)

Recher, H.F. (1971) Sharing of habitat by three congeneric honeyeaters. *Emu* 71:147-152.

Recher, H.F. (1977) Ecology of co-existing White-cheeked and New Holland Honeyeaters. *Emu* 77: 136-142.

Schodde, R. and Mason, I.J. (1999) *The Directory of Australian Birds: Passerines*. CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood.

Sibley, D. (2012) *Sibley Guides* (online) 'What is the submoustachial' 7 March 2012; 'A head feather survey' 9 March 2012. https://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/03/what-is-the-submoustachial/; https://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/03/a-head-feather-survey/

Accepted 30 November 2023

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 117-120

FIRST RECORD OF WANDERING WHISTLING-DUCK IN THE SOUTHERN TABLELANDS AND SURROUNDING AREAS

FRANK ANTRAM

PO Box 149, Goulburn NSW 2580, Australia

fantram@aussiebb.com.au

***Abstract**: Two Wandering Whistling-ducks were recorded in Goulburn on 8 April 2023. This is the first documented record of the species for the Southern Tablelands and Southern Highlands of NSW, including the ACT.*

Background

The Wandering Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna arcuata*) is distributed in Australia 'from area of Broome, WA coastally and near coast to Grafton, NSW' (Marchant and Higgins 1990). Whilst it is primarily a bird of northern Australia and the east coast of Queensland, it is, as its name suggests, prone to wandering when conditions are favourable. Marchant and Higgins (1990) state that movements of the species are poorly understood, either migratory or dispersive to ephemeral swamps inland and coastal. It has been recorded as far south as Tasmania, according to eBird data. The species is now considered to be resident in the Newcastle area (Williams 2019). However, southerly records are few and far between. The occurrence of two birds in Goulburn is, therefore, significant as the species has not previously been reported for the Southern Tablelands and Southern Highlands, including the ACT (Frith 1976; Cooper *et al.* 2014; Antram and Mahoney 2019; Hermes 2017).

A search of the eBird (https://ebird.org/) and Birdata (https://birdata.birdlife.org.au/) databases showed the nearest records of this species to Goulburn to be:

2 birds in Camden, 17-18 November 2020, approximately 140 kms northeast,
2 birds in South Nowra, 11-14 October 2017, approximately 120 kms east,
12 birds in Holbrook, 16 October 2010, approximately 300 kms southwest.

The site, the maturation ponds on Gorman Road, Goulburn, is just outside COG's Area of Interest (AOI) at -34.725414, 149.769346. The site is currently a restricted area, owned by Goulburn Mulwaree Council (GMC) and presently leased for cattle grazing, with no general public access. According to M. Hollands (GMC, pers. comm., 14 September 2023), the maturation ponds are understood to have been constructed in the early 1990s for the purpose of tertiary treatment (ultraviolet radiation) of treated effluent before irrigation to the GMC farm. GMC ceased using the ponds in November 2018 when a new wastewater treatment plant was commissioned.

I have been surveying the site on a semi-regular basis since April 2013. At time of writing (5 October 2023), a total of 153 species have been recorded by me and other observers (refer to eBird data at https://ebird.org/hotspot/L2558119).

The site has proven (in my view) to be important as a drought refuge for waterfowl, including Blue-billed Duck (Oxyura australis) and Freckled Duck (Stictonetta naevosa), both listed as vulnerable in NSW under the State's Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. High counts for these species are 100+ Blue-bills in June 2013 and 2014 (the species also breeds at the site) and 31 Freckled Duck in January 2020.

The Goulburn Field Naturalists Society has advocated since 2016 for GMC to conserve the site as a bird reserve.

The observation

On 8 April 2023, I was doing one of my usual surveys of the ponds. I follow a regular path - a sort of 'figure of eight' track around the three ponds - a distance of 3 kms (Fig. 1 shows the track and X marks where the birds were found). I was close to completing my survey, returning to the western corner of pond 1, when, as normal, all the ducks took flight as I was walking quite close to them at that point. However, on this occasion, when I was about 100 metres away, I noticed that 2 ducks did not fly, but moved quickly into the nearside vegetation. This was unusual behaviour so I waited until they emerged again. I noticed immediately that they had rather long necks and thought they were probably whistling-ducks and must be Plumed (Dendrocygna eytoni). However, I could not see well due to the light being behind the ducks. I ventured forward slowly and they returned to the vegetation. I skirted around quietly to get to the other side of them, and waited. They reappeared and I was able to ascertain that they had dark crowns and black bills, and short, horizontal flank plumes, indicating Wandering Whistling-duck. I was able to get a couple of photos with a Nikon Coolpix B700. The birds returned to the vegetation and I let them be.

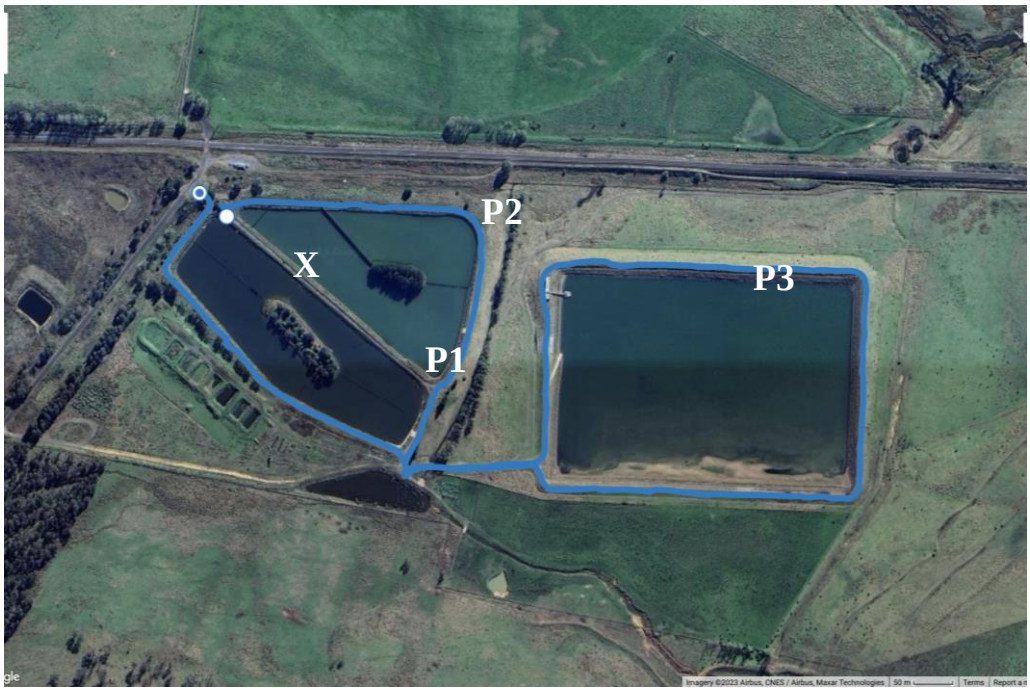


Fig. 1. The Maturation Ponds (P1 to P3) showing the regular survey track in blue. 'X' marks the area where the birds were seen.

I did not see the birds again on 9 or 10 April, or thereafter. I have not previously seen this species south of Newcastle. Although I realised this was a very unusual observation, I did not appreciate at the time how significant it was.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Michael Lenz and Greg McLachlan for useful suggestions and assistance on my draft note.

References

Antram, F. and Mahoney, A. (2019) Birds of Goulburn and District. Goulburn Field Naturalists Society Inc., Goulburn.

Cooper, R.M., McAllan, I.A.W. and Curtis, B.R. (2014) An atlas of the birds of NSW & ACT. Vol. 1, Emus to Plains Wanderer. NSW Bird Atlassers Inc., Woolgoolga.

Hermes, N. (2017) A photographic field guide to the birds of the Australian High Country. John Beaufort Publishing, Oxford.

Frith, H.J. (ed.) (1976) Birds in the Australian High Country. Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. (1990) Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds Vol. 1, Ratites to ducks. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Williams, D. (ed.) (2019) Hunter Region Annual Bird Report Number 26 (2018), Hunter Bird Observers Club Inc., New Lambton.

Accepted 12 October 2023

NOTES

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 121-122

VERY LARGE NUMBER OF EASTERN SPINEBILLS FEEDINGON PLANTED GREVILLEAS ON RED HILL

JOHN LEONARD

calyptorhynchus@gmail.com

Abstract: *In July 2023 a concentration of Eastern Spinebills* (Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris) *with a maximum of 80 birds was recorded in two neighbouring patches (total area 624 m^2) of planted* Grevillea rosmarinifolia *(137 bushes) in Canberra. Up to 30 birds stayed for two weeks. This gives a theoretical density of 1170 birds/ha and 439 birds/ha respectively. Such high densities do not seem to have been recorded for the Eastern Spinebill before.*

On 10 Jul 2023 at around 09:00 h I was running along the bottom of the ditch north of the Deakin Firetrail on the northern flank of Red Hill Reserve. I paused because I noticed that in one patch of planted grevilleas (*Grevillea rosmarinifolia*) there were a large number of Eastern Spinebills (*Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris*) feeding. In this patch and another patch further along, I counted a total of 80 individuals.

Figure 1. Part of the more westerly of the two sites.

The night had been very mild and the flowers of these shrubs looked as though they had only just opened. I assumed that the large number of Spinebills was due to the new flowering and the fact that the nectar was flowing well on that mild morning.

I returned the next day at a similar time but only counted 25 individuals in these two patches. For the next few weeks, I returned regularly at that time in the morning a couple of days a week but never counted more than 30 on any one day, with a slow erosion of numbers over the period, presumably correlating with the decline of the flowers.

It is worth mentioning that at the points where the two patches occur the ditch is some distance from the Deakin Firetrail, so observers walking along this path would not be aware of the Spinebills on these shrubs.

The western patch is at -35.320, 149.107 and measures ca. 28 x 15 m, and holds 53 grevillea bushes; the eastern patch at -35.319, 149.109, and covers an area of ca. 33 x 8 m and has 74 Grevillea bushes. Both patches are located on the southern slope of the ditch.

The number of Spinebills on the first day was remarkably high. For Canberra, Wilson (1964) states that the species is widely distributed in the ACT and surroundings. Birds move to the milder lower parts of the ACT in winter 'when grevilleas and banksias provide copious amounts of nectar' (Taylor and COG 1992). Wilson (1964) could band many Spinebills over winter at the National Australian Botanic Garden, but does not provide a density figure. Bell (1980) reports a density of 0.02-0.03 birds/ha in clearings below power lines at the Black Mountain Reserve, and a density of 0.01 bird/ha in neighbouring dry sclerophyll forest over April and May. Density figures (birds/ha) given in Higgins *et al*. (2001) from different areas of the species' distribution range vary from 0.01 to 0.5 birds/ha.

The two Red Hills sites have a combined area of 684 m^2 (6.84% of a ha) and using the maximum number of 80 Spinebills sighted, this would theoretically translate to a density of 1170 birds/ha. But for about two weeks the area with 137 grevillea bushes supported around 30 Spinebills, *i.e.* 439 birds/ha. Such high densities do not seem to have been recorded for the Eastern Spinebill before.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Isobel Crawford for the identification of the Grevillea and to Michael Lenz for the references and analysis of the species' density at these spots.

References

Bell, H.L. (1980) The effects of a power-line clearing on birds of dry sclerophyll forest at Black Mountain Reserve, Australian Capital Territory. *Corella* 4: 8-19.

Higgins, P.J., Peter, J.M. and Steele, W.K. (2001) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds.* Vol. 5 *Tyrant-flycatchers to Chats.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Taylor, M. and Canberra Ornithologists Group (1992) *Birds of the Australian Capital Territory – an Atlas.* Canberra Ornithologists Group and National Capital Planning Authority, Canberra.

Wilson, S.J. (1964) The Eastern Spinebill in the ACT. *The Australian Bird Bander* 2: 100-106.

Accepted 26 November 2023

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 123

MOBILITY OF MASKED LAPWING CHICKS

MARTIN BUTTERFIELD
martinflab@gmail.com

For the third year a pair of Masked Lapwings (*Vanellus miles*) have nested on the lawn of our neighbour's house[1] at Mallacoota. The eggs hatched on 1st to 2nd of Aug 2023. The four chicks spent the latter part of 2 Aug exploring the lawn (area 400 sq metres) on which the nest was situated, with the amount of territory covered varying between chicks, possibly related to hatching order.

Early on 3 Aug the chicks were seen climbing through a chain link fence into a horse paddock to the North of the lawn. Later that day the adults, and at least two of the chicks were observed at the bottom of this paddock. Measuring on Google Earth this is a vertical drop of 30m and a horizontal distance of 150m.

The chicks were not sighted on 4 Aug, although the adults were in the next paddock West (occupied by alpacas and kangaroos). On the morning of 5 Aug the adults and at least three chicks appeared on the front lawn of a neighbouring house. By 09:00 h on 5 Aug the adults had crossed the road and it seemed the chicks were in slightly longer grass – and thus no longer visible – at the far end of this block. In a straight line this is approximately 200m from their furthest known point. Linking the various points where the chicks were seen, they had covered at least 500m since hatching. A summary of the movements is shown in the attached snip from Google Earth.

Accepted XXX

[1] This year the neighbours were not in residence during the nesting period. Last year they were present for most of both nesting attempts and tolerated not being able to use their lawn (and only visiting their firewood pile with difficulty, wearing crash helmets and sheltering under an umbrella).

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 124

URBAN BIRD POLITICS: AN AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE HOLDS DOWN A COMMON MYNA

MATTHEW MO

matthew.sk.mo@gmail.com

On 6 Oct 2019, sudden intense vocalisations alerted me to a confrontation between a pair of Australian Magpies (*Gymnorhina tibicen*) and three Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*) on a suburban road in Canberra. The entire confrontation lasted 6 minutes from the time my observations commenced.

For the first 2 minutes, magpies and mynas performed aerial swoops on each other. Then, one magpie descended on one of the mynas and held it down against the bitumen. The other magpie stood approximately 1 m away and the other two mynas briefly moved away. The magpie held the myna for approximately 4 minutes, during which the myna intermittently emitted distress calls and the magpies were mostly silent. One of the mynas returned and mobbed the magpies, which prompted the magpie holding down the myna to release its grasp within seconds.

Once released, the myna and its conspecifics flew away. The magpies remained in the vicinity and commenced foraging on the lawns adjacent to the road. During these observations, there was no vehicle traffic at the vicinity.

Accepted 7 October 2023

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 125-129

COLUMNIST'S CORNER

Why some bird species have 'common' in their name, even though they might be quite rare

'The common cormorant (or shag)
Lays eggs inside a paper bag.'

Those are the first lines of a nonsense poem written in 1928 by the English author Christopher Isherwood. He was probably indifferent to what might have seemed nonsense to an English bird observer, that a common cormorant and a shag were the same thing. Of two species of cormorant found in the British Isles, the 'Common Cormorant' was one, and the 'Shag' (the name referring to a crest) was the other. Those lines might have been better directed to Australian observers, who know that here 'shag' can mean not a particular species but '(loosely) any cormorant' (*Macquarie Dictionary* 4th ed.).

I am afraid I have begun with a digression. My purpose is to discuss the adjective 'Common' as used in the English names of bird species. Before any kind of standard names, there were, considering here just the British Isles, provincial or dialect names. For example, the Common Sandpiper was known in different places as Fiddler, Sand Lark, Sandy Laverock, Shad Bird, Weet Weet, and Willy Wicket.

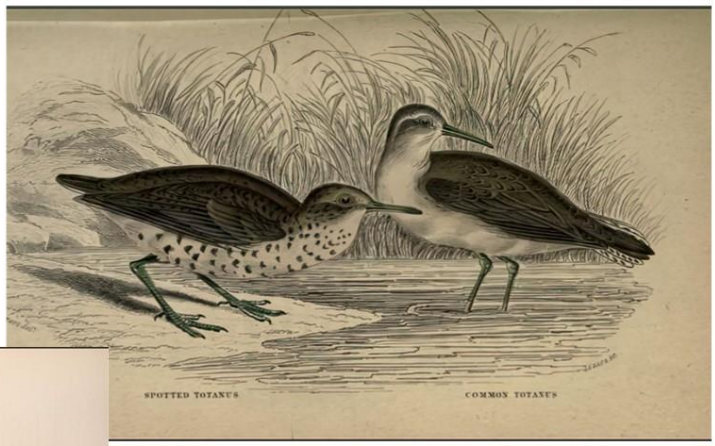
In the 19th century, when bird species were being classified scientifically to indicate relationships, ornithologists and authors adopted more appropriate non-scientific names for use in publications. We can see that trend in two publications: John Gould's *Birds of Europe* (1837) and the 'Ornithology' volumes of the *Naturalist's Library* edited by William Jardine, from 1833. At that time, 'Common' became a much-used label, although not employed with any great precision.

Some examples of names from the *Naturalist's Library*, volumes 3 (1843) and 4 (1860), are given here. These are only a few of the many names from the time that incorporated 'Common' as an adjective. For each species William Jardine gave a selected name (upper case below) followed by information about it and any other name:

THE COMMON CRANE 'Common Crane *of British authors'*
THE COMMON QUAIL '*Quail or Common Quail of Brit. Ornith.*'
THE COMMON BITTERN 'The Common Bittern, or Bittern-Heron*, of British authors*'.
THE COMMON TEAL 'Teal, or Common Teal *of British authors*.'
THE COMMON CORMORANT '*Cormorant of British authors'*.
THE COMMON TOTANUS 'The Common Sandpiper *of British ornithologists*. – Provincially Summer Snipe, Will-Wicket, Sand Lark, or Sandy Lavrock.' [See also above]

Where there is a national bird organization and a national bird list we are likely to see, as in Australia, the adoption of new policies with respect to bird names. In the United Kingdom, by 1923, the British Ornithologists' Union had given effect to a policy of revising many non-scientific names so they consisted of a bare noun *e.g.* 'Cuckoo', 'Kingfisher', 'Swift'. The first five species mentioned above lost the 'Common', thus becoming Crane, Quail, Bittern, Teal, Cormorant.

Right, from *The Naturalist's Library*, 'The Common Totanus' (Sandpiper) with, on left, a close relative vagrant to Britain,'The Spotted Totanus'. Below: from John Gould's *The Birds of Europe* (1837) 'Common Cormorant', now Great Cormorant.



As presented by John Gould: right , 'Fairy Sandpiper' (Common Sandpiper) from *Birds of Australia.* Below, 'Common Sandpiper', 'adult and young bird in Autumn', from *Birds of Europe*.

Naturally enough, over time new policies emerged. Recently, the BOU has adopted a set of English names for international use, alongside its set of 'English vernacular names', the latter being more familiar to British birders. The vernacular names are the short ones, often without adjectives. See https://bou.org.uk/british-list/bird-names/

Some 37 of the international names for British birds are different from the vernacular ones by reason of the reintroduction of the adjective 'Common'. The 19th century adjective has enjoyed a renaissance. The index of the 16-volume Lynx Ediciones *Birds of the World* gives some 240 species names beginning with 'Common'. These range, alphabetically, from the Common Akepa (an alternative name for an endangered Hawaiian honeycreeper with a tiny range) to Common Yellowthroat (a New World warbler with an extensive migratory range across North America).

Let's look at the 'Common' species in the list maintained by Birdlife Australia. There are 19 species to be considered. Eleven of them are vagrants or introductions.

Vagrants and introductions

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* [introduced]
Common [or Eurasian] Teal *Anas crecca* [vagrant]
Common Swift *Apus apus* [vagrant]
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* [vagrant]
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* [vagrant]
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* [introduced]
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* [introduced]
Common Blackbird *Turdus merula* [introduced]
Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coeleb* [vagrant, from NZ introduction]
Common [or European] Greenfinch *Chloris chloris* [introduced]
Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea* [introduced]

Others

Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
Common Diving-Petrel *Pelecanoides urinatrix*
Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
Common Cicadabird *Edolisoma tenuirostris*

A few comments on the more interesting of those names are offered here. In some names, 'Common' has been firmly attached to the species name since the 19th century (*e.g.* Common Sandpiper, Common Tern). In others, the 'Common' is a relatively recent addition to distinguish a species from others with the same noun. For example, 'Greenshank' was the BOU vernacular name 1923 (and 2012). It was used in Clements 1974, RAOU recommendations 1978, and Howard & Moore 1980. Then 'Common Greenshank' appeared: Sibley & Monroe 1990; Christidis & Boles 1994; Gill & Wright 2006.

'Common Bronzewing' is a long-standing Australian name. As John Gould was writing about other bronze-wings, he used 'Common Bronze-wing' for this one because it was 'generally distributed over all parts of Australia', perhaps also because it 'was constantly eaten by every class of persons resident in Australia'. (Not so much these days, I believe.)

The group of cuckoo-shrikes now known as 'cicadabirds' has had a complicated history with respect to English names. In 1831, William Jardine had given 'Slender-billed Gracaulus' (sic) as the name of the species listed here. The noun has been 'Campephaga' (Gould),

'Caterpillar-eater', 'Triller', 'Cicada-bird' (Cayley, 1931), 'Graybird' and 'Greybird'. In 1986, the name 'Cicadabird' was the noun used for each of a group of associated species found in islands to the north of Australia, with the most widespread species, the one that occurs in Australia as well as in Wallacea and New Guinea, being designated 'Common Cicadabird'.

The Common Gull-billed Tern illustrates a problem with global name lists. Birdlife Australia follows Birdlife International in recognizing two species occurring in Australia: Common Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* and Australian Gull-billed Tern *G. macrotarsa*. However, some global lists that recognize the two species are unwilling to change the name of the widespread species, so retain 'Gull-billed Tern' for *G. nilotica* and invent a new label for *G. macrotarsa e.g.* 'Australian Tern'.

A disadvantage in adopting international bird names is that we sometimes get labels that are not suitable here, with rare or uncommon vagrants carrying the label 'Common'. The Common Tern is far from being the common tern in Australia.

Happily, a case can be made that the durable title 'Common Sandpiper' is appropriate here. In 1837, writing about European birds, Gould spoke of the 'tame and inoffensive disposition' of what he called the 'Common Sandpiper'. Compared to 'many others of its tribe', it 'appeared to be adapted to climates of a milder kind, and to inhabit peculiar localities'. As a breeding migrant 'it retreats to inland lakes, rivers and small brooks, the banks of which it enlivens during the whole of the summer with its active and sprightly habits …'.

Jardine wrote of it:

> This pretty and lively species is one of the most common, being a regular summer visitant, many pairs frequenting the banks of every stream and river, or the margins of Scotch lakes … . It frequents the edges of these waters, running along them, and picking up aquatic insects, moving its body as it runs, occasionally flitting along, whistling as it flies, and perching on some stone, the top of a stake, or bare branch by the water side.

Gould did not come across the species in Australia, but from specimens declared it a new species that he called 'Fairy Sandpiper'. Later, in the *Handbook*, he said further comparison showed it to be 'the Common Sandpiper of Europe'. He added that, from Gilbert's description of the habits, –

> Those persons resident in Australia who are conversant with our British birds will readily recognize the well-known Summer Snipe, a bird which appears to be almost universally distributed over the Old World.

In Australia as a non-breeding migrant, this species is nowhere abundant and is not the most common sandpiper. However, it is occasionally a familiar suburban sight. Typically, it makes solitary repeated visits to its chosen locations, often close to human occupation. This offers quite a contrast to other visiting sandpipers, which typically forage and roost in nervous flocks in places where there is food to support large numbers. I remember one Common Sandpiper that spent repeated southern summers in front of a busy yacht club, dividing its time between pottering around the boat ramp and roosting on the nearby moored boats.

Recently we have seen one or more members of this species enlivening with active and sprightly habits the margins of the water bodies of the Canberra suburb of Tuggeranong. It (or they) appeared in the warmer months of the five years to 2023. Not really a common species, but commonish from time to time.

Stentoreus

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 130-131

Birding in Cyberspace, Canberra Style

Birders often find themselves engrossed in discussions about binoculars. We regularly exchange insights on our binocular purchases and offer or seek advice on this topic.

Recently, I was drawn to an update from Bintel, a Sydney-based optics retailer whose services are used by many birders in the Canberra region. In October 2023, they shared an article on their website titled **'Do you have an old pair of binoculars? What can you do with them?'** [https://www.bintel.com.au/old-binoculars-what-can-be-done/]. This piece, although initially addressing the use of binoculars in astronomy, provides valuable insights equally applicable to birding. Earl White, the author from Bintel, argues that, 'The old pair of binoculars you've had for many years might have some new life breathed into them with a careful clean. Take your time and head out to enjoy the spring weather and the night sky above us!'

The article begins with practical tips for rejuvenating old binoculars, emphasizing the importance of cleaning misty or cloudy optics. It recommends using air dusters, i.e. compressed air in cans, easily available in stationery stores.

Additionally, it covers the identification and correction of poor collimation and delves into mechanical problems and the restoration of old binoculars. I found particularly interesting his discussion about binoculars with sentimental value. The article notes that only a select few companies specialise in their restoration, providing helpful links for the same.

Furthermore, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has recently published informative material on binoculars. Visiting [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/best-affordable-compact-binoculars-review/] offers access to **'Get The Most Out Of Your Binoculars with this Free, Handy Guide!'**. 'Binoculars are an important tool for watching birds, but no one is born knowing how to use them. This free PDF guide will help you understand the basics of how to fit, adjust, and use binoculars to look at birds, and even answer some common issues as well.' This guide is a recommended resource for beginners and serves as a useful refresher for more seasoned birders.

The primary focus of their webpage is an August 2023 review of **The Best Affordable Compact Binoculars (8×32)**. Contrary to the scepticism about compacts sometimes expressed by veteran birders, the review discusses both the benefits and drawbacks of compact binoculars. It details the evaluation process for the 24 binocular models reviewed and highlights the reviewers' top five picks:

> Five compact binoculars made our Top Picks list. All five offer a very bright, colorful image and pleasing ergonomics. Holding them up to our eyes, they all produced big, sharp images without the tunnel vision effects mentioned above. These are binoculars that bring out the joy in birdwatching. They find focus easily, the lenses cut through glare, and images fill your eyes with sharpness and color virtually from edge to edge.

For those interested in a more comprehensive assessment, the Cornell Lab also offers a detailed December 2022 review of 'Affordable Full-Size 8×42 Binoculars' at

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/the-cornell-lab-review-affordable-full-size-8x42-binoculars/].

Shifting focus to binocular *usage*, I was somewhat surprised to see a recent post on the CanberraBirds email discussion list referring disparagingly to the quality of eBird data. Notably, eBird is a widely used repository for Australian birders and contributes significantly to the Atlas of Living Australia and to global scientific research. Indeed, at the time of writing (mid-November 2023) the Cornell Lab of Ornithology lists 62 articles using eBird data published so far this year in peer-reviewed scientific journals, another nine in press, and another eight published in non-peer reviewed sources.

In further contrast to the CanberraBirds correspondent's claim, in September 2023, CSIRO highlighted the pivotal role of citizen science in a press release titled **'Aussies provide more than 62 million species records for conservation research'**. It explains that 'The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) shows that citizen science is now more important than ever in helping to better understand Australia's rich biodiversity … There's so much untapped potential for scientific output from open-source data infrastructures like the ALA and around the world.'

The release is based upon a recently published open access paper: Roger, E., Kellie, D., Slatyer, C., Brenton, P., Torresan, O., Wallis, E. and Zerger, A. 2023, 'Open access research infrastructures are critical for improving the accessibility and utility of citizen science: a case study of Australia's National Biodiversity Infrastructure, the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA)', *Citizen Science: Theory and Practice*, vol. 8, no. 1, article 56, DOI: https://doi.org/10.5334/cstp.564.

The paper's authors discuss how research infrastructure, '… like the ALA, supports common citizen science data challenges by implementing tools to standardise complex data, to safely store sensitive data, and to improve participation and discoverability of citizen science data. Our findings demonstrate the importance of investment in open access research infrastructure to support and augment the scientific value of the citizen science movement globally.' A sentiment I wholeheartedly share!

T. alba

This column is available online at http://canberrabirds.org.au/publications/canberra-bird-notes/. There you can access the web sites mentioned here by clicking on the hyperlinks.
To join (subscribe to) the CanberraBirds email discussion list, send an empty email message to canberrabirds-subscribe@lists.canberrabirds.org.au. To unsubscribe, either permanently or temporarily, send an email message to canberrabirds-unsubscribe@lists.canberrabirds.org.au. If you wish to re-subscribe after being unsubscribed temporarily, simply follow the 'subscribe' instructions above.
The CanberraBirds list's searchable archive is at http://bioacoustics.cse.unsw.edu.au/archives/html/canberrabirds

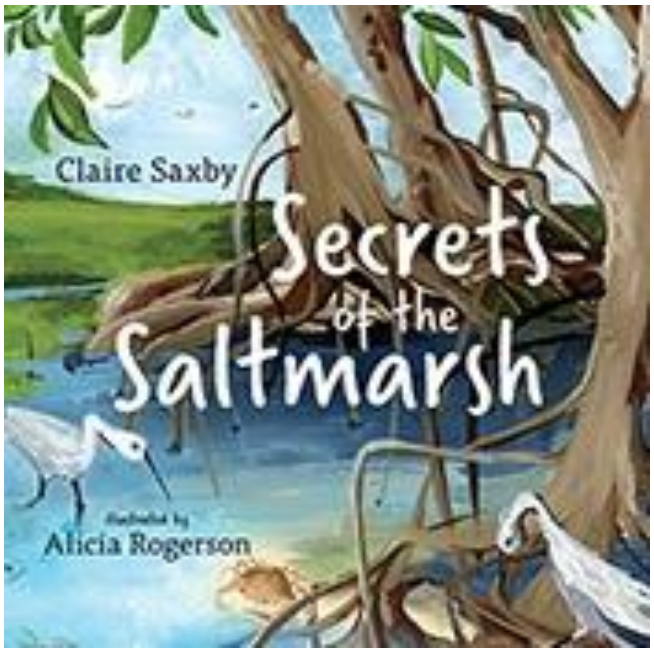
BOOK REVIEW

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2023): 132-133

CSIRO Publishing has released another book aimed at primary school children.

Secrets of the Saltmarsh. By Claire Saxby, illustrated by Alicia Rogerson. CSIRO Publishing November 2023 ISBN: 9781486317141, Hardback, 25x25 cm size, 32pp., RRP Au$24.99.

Reviewed by *JANETTE LENZ, Lyneham, ACT 2604 (lenz.michael.janette@gmail.com)*



Saltmarshes are full of energy and life. They provide food and shelter for migratory birds as well as microscopic plants and animals. They also protect coastlines.

Secrets of the Saltmarsh is a beautiful new children's picture book which explains facets of the saltmarsh habitat.

The writer, Claire Saxby, whose awards include the Childrens Book Council of Australia Honour Book award, NSW Premier's Literary award and the Whiteley award, says on her website, 'Picture books have only a few words but they have to be the right words,' and this is most evident in the spare but direct text.

The book is narrated in the first person by various habitat types, the text providing simple, accurate details. 'Saltmarsh' says, 'You will find me where land meets sea.' The 'Saltmarsh Wetland' says, 'I am always changing.' The 'Ocean' says, 'I swash the saltmarsh' – swash being a contraction of the words wash and swirl. 'Water', 'Wind' and 'Sunlight' add their contributions to the life of the area.

Groups of selected plants, birds, insects, fish, crustaceans and micro-organisms then tell of their place in the saltmarsh environment. Alicia Rogerson's water-colour illustrations include recognisable water-colour illustrations of a few migratory waders, egret, spoonbill and Little Grassbird. The next pages are more general but cover the seasons and simplified details of the life-cycles of the plants, animals and birds which rely upon the habitat. A Mangrove tree tells its own story as an important neighbour to the saltmarsh.

The last pages are more detailed, with facts older children may wish to learn, for example, a simplified explanation of carbon storage, and a Glossary.

The expressive illustrations make the book attractive. Alicia Rogerson's biography describes her as an artist and illustrator who spends her days painting and dreaming. She writes in the

dedication, ‘For my children. For your joy in climbing rocks, exploring the land, your embrace of the natural world. Celebrating the uniqueness, the beauty, the unexpected.’

Reading level varies from child to child, but the book is recommended for ages 5–9.

Teacher Notes are free to download from the CSIRO Publishing website at publish.csiro.au/book/8101/#for teachers

Canberra Bird Notes 48(2) (2022): 134

RARITIES PANEL NEWS

There has been a fair amount of "unusual" bird activity over the past six months, with arguably the most interesting observations those of the female Australian Painted-snipe at the STEP garden at the National Arboretum at the end of October. These and other records were not submitted directly to the Panel but as they were supported by clear photographs, the Panel has no problem with them.

The Panel did consider one older record from 2021 of a White-breasted Woodswallow at the Jerrabomberra Wetlands. This is a migratory species which reaches the southern limits of its range in the warmer months and is highly unusual in our area. In fact we believe this would be the first endorsed record. The distinctive features of the White-breasted Woodswallow as distinct from the more common (in our area) Masked Woodswallow are the completely dark grey head and neck and a distinct cut-off line above the white breast. And a white rump.

The Panel was unable to endorse a raptor record, even though it regarded it as probable, for want of detail. It reminds submitters particularly of records of unusual raptors to take note of tail shape and flight pattern, and not to rely on single identification features.

While not an "unusual" bird per se, the Panel was interested to receive a photographic record of a Superb Lyrebird in Barton in October. It presumed the bird was a dispersing juvenile which had possibly followed the Molonglo River.

The Panel continues to receive ad hoc records from the general public of species which are 'unusual' to the observer – the Crested Pigeon and the koel are regulars!

ENDORSED LIST 103, DECEMBER 2023

Australian Painted-snipe *Rostratula australis*

1 female; 31 Oct; Jane Cooksley; National Arboretum

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*

1; 12 Sep 2021; Alastair Smith and Peter Milburn; Jerrabomberra Wetlands NR

Barbara Allan *allanbm@bigpond.net.au*

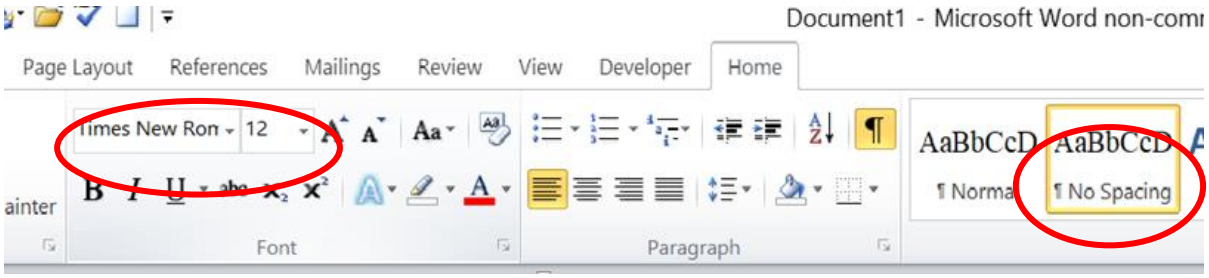

White-breasted Woodswallow (left: *Shorty Westlin*; right: *G. and B. Austin*)

Female Australian Painted Snipe, 1 Nov 2023, National Arboretum (*John Hurrell*)

Canberra Bird Notes

Canberra Bird Notes is published three times a year by the Canberra Ornithologists Group Inc. and is edited by Michael Lenz and Kevin Windle. Major articles of up to 5000 words are welcome on matters relating to the biology, status, distribution, behaviour or identification of birds in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounding region. Please discuss any proposed major contribution in advance. Shorter notes, book reviews and other contributions are also encouraged. All contributions should be sent to one of those email addresses: CBN@canberrabirds.org.au or michael.lenz.birds@gmail.com

Please submit contributions in *Times New Roman, with 12-point Font Size and 'No Spacing'* (see illustration below):



Please note that the views expressed in the articles published in *Canberra Bird Notes* are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Canberra Ornithologists Group. Responses to the views expressed in CBN articles are always welcome and will be considered for publication as letters to the editor.

Information specifically for contributors to Canberra Bird Notes regarding copyright and dissemination of contents COG publishes CBN in digital formats, including as pdf files on COG's website, as well as in printed format. Copyright in the contents of CBN is retained by individual contributors, not by COG as publisher. In addition, COG has entered into an agreement with EBSCO Information Services for CBN to be included in the international online journal database Academic Search Ultimate (https://www.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/academic-searchultimate) available to libraries and others. This provides increased exposure of CBN articles to Australian and international readers. Contributors of material published in CBN are requested to provide written permission for their contributions to be indexed by EBSCO Information Services. Enquiries can be directed to cogoffice@canberrabirds.org.au. version 2: 25 August 2022, published 31 August 2022 Version 3: 21 September 2023Copyright in the contents of *CBN* is retained by the individual contributors, not by the publisher, the Canberra Ornithologists Group, Inc. (COG). COG publishes *CBN* in digital formats, including as pdf files at COG's website, as well as in the printed format.

In addition, COG has entered into an agreement with the firm EBSCO Information Services for them to include *CBN* in their international online journals database Academic Search Ultimate. Information on this database is available online at https://www.ebscohost.com/academic/academic-search-ultimate. This means that the contents of *CBN* are indexed by EBSCO Information Services and included in the databases that they make available to libraries and others, providing increased exposure of its contents to Australian and international readers. Contributors of material published in *CBN* are

requested to provide written permission for their contributions to be indexed by EBSCO Information Services.

We refer to ‘contributors’ rather than ‘authors’ as sometimes we publish photographs, as well as written content.

CANBERRA BIRD NOTES 48(2) DECEMBER 2023

Articles

Notes

Columnist's Corner

Book Review

CBN 48 (2) Dec 2023 (3).pdf
Printed December 2023