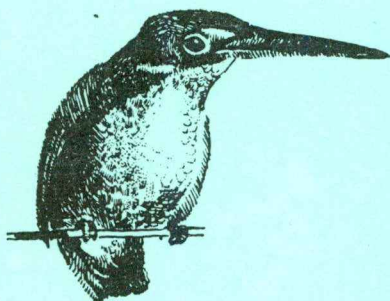


# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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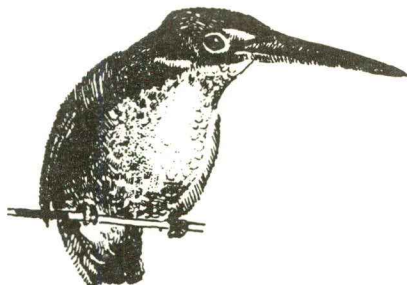
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# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



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## SUPERB FRUIT-DOVE AT PENNANT HILLS, SYDNEY

M. CRAWFORD

On 28 April 1981 at about 1300 hours a Superb Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus superbus*, flew into the window of the Pennant Hills Infants School and fell to the concrete sun-deck. A teacher was called and she reported that "the bird was gasping for breath", then went limp and motionless, apparently dead. Twenty minutes later when the teacher went to collect the body, there were signs of life, so that the bird was placed in a shoe-box and taken to a warm classroom.

When I collected the bird at about 1600 hours it was quite lively. The bird was placed in a larger carton with a covered hot water bottle and various items of food, sprays of cotoneaster berries, pieces of banana and apple, and a glucose drink. Interest in the berries was registered, but the bird was not seen eating.

At my house at Hornsby Heights, adjoining Galston Gorge, the bird was handled briefly and encouraged to eat and drink, but with little success. When I covered the carton for the night, a length of green cooked bean was hung by a string at a suitable height. In the morning all the bean had gone, and the level of drinking water had fallen.

Four members of the New South Wales Field Ornithologists' Club saw the bird, and photographs were taken before it was released at about 1000 hours on 29 April. Upon release the bird flew strongly into a Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus haemostomus*, where it rested for about an hour, almost invisible among the leaves. Since then the bird has not been seen or heard.

The bird's appearance accorded with the identification description for a male Superb Fruit-Dove, given in G. Pizzey (1980 *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*), except that the orange-chestnut on the hindneck was incomplete, and a few green feathers showed in the purple crown.



Two previous sightings of this species have been reported, in the bushland that runs from Pennant Hills, through Galston Gorge to Berowra. Robert Salt of the Hornsby Wildlife Conservation Society recalls that on a walk with the Society in the Pennant Hills end of the valley during 1965, when bird bander Ray Dickens was present, a small colourful fruit pigeon was sighted, that he feels certain was a Superb Fruit-Dove and not a Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *P. regina*. A further sighting was made by Geoffrey Sharpe, a near neighbour, who reported in July 1978 seeing a "beautiful little dove with green and purple feathers" in the Galston Gorge. Standard reference texts were consulted and Geoffrey picked out the Superb Fruit-Dove. When he saw this latest specimen he confirmed that it was the same species.

Prior to 1960 there were only three records of the Superb Fruit-Dove in the Sydney district and these were summarised by Hindwood and McGill (1958 *The Birds of Sydney* pp 15). Since that time the following observations have been reported, viz:-

- 30.10.1969 An adult male flew into a window at Cowan. *Birds* 5, 71.
- 5. 3.1973 Male found dead at Lane Cove (E.S. Hoskin in litt.).
- 24. 3.1973 Female flew into a window at Bellevue Hill. *Aust. Birds* 13,11.
- 9. 8.1977 One found dead beside a road at Wahroonga. *Aust. Birds* 13,11.
- 21. 4.1980 Adult male flew into a window at Killarney Heights. *Aust. Birds*, 16, 11.
- 27. 4.1981 Immature female flew into a window of home units at Cremorne.  
(T. Lindsey pers comm.).

I wish to acknowledge the help of the Keith Hindwood Bird Recording Service per favour E.S. Hoskin, for information used in this article.

MRS. MOLLY CRAWFORD, 34 Ulolo Ave., Hornsby Heights, N.S.W. 2077.



## FOOD OF SOME RAPTORS AT ARMIDALE, NEW SOUTH WALES

S.J.S. DEBUS

During 1979 and 1980, casual observations were made on predation by several raptor species at Armidale on the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales. These observations were fortuitous, being made in conjunction with other work on the raptors there (in prep.). A small sample of pellets and prey remains was also incidentally collected from beneath roosts and nests in 1980. This small sample and the number of observations are of little quantitative value.

**Black-shouldered Kite** *Elanus notatus*

Virtually all of perhaps 15 observed prey items in both years were mice, probably House Mouse *Mus musculus*. Exceptions were two small skinks. The few pellets and prey remains consisted of House Mice and a rat, probably Black Rat *Rattus rattus*. The literature has given the impression that this species is a generalist, but I believe it is better treated as a rodent specialist like other forms in the genus. Slater (1979) stated its favourite prey to be the House Mouse.

**Wedge-tailed Eagle** *Aquila audax*

The few prey remains collected from under three nests represented a dozen or so individuals, and consisted of mainly rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus* and hares *Lepus capensis*, with some lamb *Ovis aries* at one nest. About six pellets from under this nest contained lagomorph fur, sheep wool and feathers. This suggests a similar diet to that on the Southern Tablelands: mostly rabbit and hare, with some lamb and bird, and other items (Leopold and Wolfe 1970).

**Australian Kestrel** *Falco cenchroides*

Of two samples each of about ten pellets, all contained mostly insect remains. Many also contained scales of a small skink, and a few contained feathers. Mammal remains may have gone undetected as examination was cursory, but none were obvious. Kestrels were observed to prey on insects (beetles, Coleoptera and locusts, Orthoptera), skinks and the occasional House Mouse, and made occasional attempts (not successful) on House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*. These observations suggest a similar diet to that elsewhere (Olsen et al. 1979).

**Brown Falcon** *Falco berigora*

The only observed prey items were a Black Rat and flying insects, probably winged ants. There appear to be few published accounts of this species catching flying insects. On a warm spring afternoon a pair of falcons was soaring in spirals and repeatedly taking such prey and eating it on the wing. The birds would approach an insect on a level or slightly rising course with deliberate wing beats, and then swing the pelvis forward so that the body axis was vertical as the legs were thrust forward to take the prey. The process was essentially the same as the aerial strike of the Prairie Falcon *F. mexicanus* as detailed by Goslow (1971), but at a slower speed. Incidentally, film footage from Vincent Serventy's "Nature Walkabout" television series shows this action in the Black Falcon *F. subniger*. Slow-motion film shows a falcon repeatedly trying to snatch a Budgerigar *Melopsittacus undulatus* from a milling flock, and the mechanics of its strike are virtually the same as that described for the Prairie Falcon.

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STEPHEN J.S. DEBUS, 42 Kenneth St., Longeville, N.S.W. 2066.





## NESTING OF THE LOGRUNNER AT DORRIGO

N. VAUGHAN AND J. HAYNES

The Logrunner, formerly known as the Spine-tailed Chowchilla *Orthonyx temminckii*, is a medium-sized ground bird that inhabits the subtropical rainforests of southern Queensland and northern and central New South Wales.

On 2 September 1978 a family of Logrunners was found in Dorrigo National Park, in an area of subtropical rainforest. The locality where the observation was made contained a thick covering of vegetation with an unbroken canopy at about 20 metres. Walking stick palms *Linospadix monostachyus* formed the bulk of the scrubbery. The ground had a four centimetre cover of leaves; predominantly from the Small-leaved Fig *Ficus obliqua*. The leaf litter contained a very rich fauna of amphipods.

The Logrunner family consisted of two partially feathered chicks still occupying the nest, and an adult male and female.

### DESCRIPTION OF NEST

The nest was located on the ground. It was backed by a root from the Small-leaved Fig. Its top and southern sides were hidden by several Walking-stick Palms. Ferns obscured the vision of it in all other directions. It was dome-shaped and had an oval entrance that faced east. This orientation of the entrance was observed in two other nests that were being constructed by other Logrunners. In part of the entrance to the nest there was a platform of sticks. The nest was made of fine sticks, spiders' web and moss.

Even though throughout the period of observation the day remained cloudless, no direct sunlight penetrated the canopy and shone onto the nest. The area of scratching was also free of direct sunlight.

### NEST BEHAVIOUR

The female was seen to visit the nest quite frequently, on average ten times per hour. The male never went any closer than 1.5 metres from the nest. The time spent at the nest by the female ranged from three to 30 seconds. The longest visits usually involved the collection of the faecal pellet. On the female's approach to the nest she uttered a soft clucking sound. She always stepped onto the nest platform from a bare patch of ground that was to one side of the front of the platform. The chicks were then fed from the platform, the female never entering the nest itself.

The chicks were very still and quiet for most of the time. For short periods after feeding they did become restless, moving themselves around or calling quietly. Loud quarks were heard if the platform was scratched. The chicks never ventured outside the nest.

### FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

After the female fed the young she always returned to the immediate vicinity of the male bird where she would then gather food. If she took a faecal pellet from the nest, she would drop it on commencing her search for food. There was no deliberate act of placing the pellet in any particular area. The male and female were close together when scratching for food, and rarely ventured more than one metre from each other.

The search for food was very active. The Logrunner uses a sideways kick to lift, overturn, or push aside sticks, stones and leaves. Often they lift the litter with an outstretched leg and peck under this material. After several kicks to both sides they would move less than half a metre away and start again, leaving a tell-tale clear space 15 cm in diameter.

The male usually took food to the female for her to feed the young. This occurred as often as 11 times between the female's visits to the nest. She held all the food from the male in her beak. While the female was feeding the young the male kept up his search for food. When the female returned the male's search became more vigorous. With this new vigour he would shift sticks and leaves some 20 cm in any direction.

Several faecal pellets were collected and later examined. These revealed evidence that the chicks had eaten spiders, amphipods and insects, mainly Carabid Beetles (Carabidae, Coleoptera) and ants (Hymenoptera).

Even though the male always went to the female with the food he usually initiated movement to a different area of scratching. This movement took two forms; a gradual change and also jumps. The jumps ranged from two metres to twenty metres. The male left an area of 1.5 metres radius around the nest, untouched. Most of the feeding was done in a clockwork direction around the fig tree, where the nest was located.

### BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

The Logrunners became motionless on two occasions. On the first occasion, both birds stopped for three minutes. At the conclusion of this period the flap of wings was heard in the canopy. On the second occasion, the birds acted similarly when an Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathami* moved around in the canopy.



A Yellow-throated Scrub-wren *Sericornis citreogularis*, accompanied the Logrunners for the duration of the morning. The wren did not have any noticeable affect on the Logrunners even when the wren was feeding at the same scratch. The Logrunners were also very tolerant of Thornbills, Eastern Yellow Robins *Eopsaltria australis* and other scrub-wrens.

During the day the birds were under observation they never came into contact with any other Logrunners. However, some interaction was observed next morning. On this occasion the males were involved, each displaying his white throat, the females followed the males along the invisible line. All the time the male was calling out loudly.

The effect that the presence of humans had on the birds was watched carefully. The nest was three metres away from a main walking path. When the Logrunners were feeding they could be approached to within two metres. One person could sit quietly one metre away from the nest with minimal changes in the female's feeding behaviour. If someone came nearer she would stop at the nest and look around before feeding the chicks. Her normal procedure was to fly straight to the nest and feed without hesitation. When a group of people came to look at the nest the female's visits became less frequent. Also, she would stop one metre short, look around, then proceed. The feeding pattern of the pair of logrunners then became very erratic. It was on this occasion that the male ruffled up his feathers and preened himself. This was not observed on any other occasion so it could have been a displacement activity.

The Logrunners accepted the intrusion into their daily routine with little fuss.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Hugh Ford, staff and students of the 1978 University of New England's Ecofest Spring School on Bird Study.

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*J. HAYNES, 19 Palmer Cres., Gunnedah, N.S.W. 2830.*



## GREY BUTCHERBIRD TAKING A PAINTED BUTTON-QUAIL

J.N. HOBBS

On 27 May 1981 I sat down to observe birds feeding in a small grove of wattles at the foot of the Bogolong Hills, Narrandera. I had been picking mushrooms and the birds had become accustomed to my presence moving very close to me. The grove was literally swarming with birds, well over 200 individuals being concentrated in the small area. They included, amongst others, Peaceful Doves *Geopelia placida*, two species of Cuckoos, three Whistlers, two Robins, three Thornbills, four Honeyeaters, Variegated Wrens *Malurus lamberti*, Speckled Warblers *Chthonicola sagittatus* and Double-barred Finches *Poephila bichenovii*.

Feeding at the edge of the wattles was a pair of Painted Button-quail *Turnix varia* and sitting on the fence that had once enclosed the grove was a Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus*. I had been enjoying this open aviary for over ten minutes when, suddenly, the Butcherbird flew the 20 metres separating it from the Quails, approaching them in a low dive from their rear. It landed on the back of the larger Quail, presumably the female, and before that bird had time to raise its head from feeding, the Butcherbird struck it two blows to the head with its bill. The first was to the side of the head near the ear, the second in the centre of the crown just behind the forehead. The Quail immediately collapsed and the Butcherbird jumped from it and with its bill pulled the Quail onto its back. The Quail was inert apart from some twitching of the wings and the Butcherbird began to peck viciously at the stomach causing blood to stain the feathers. Some White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus* hovered over the Butcherbird, diving at it and uttering their scolding alarms. Two Shrike-tits *Falcunculus frontatus* perched on a twig above it expressing their alarm in a peculiar whining manner.

Probably with the intention of taking refuge from these attackers the Butcherbird tried to pull the Quail into the cover of the wattle trees. It gripped it on the belly with both feet and fluttered towards the trees. The Quail, however, was too heavy for it to lift, the dragging wings caught on the grass stems tumbling the Butcherbird onto the ground. It made repeated efforts to drag the Quail away without success, all the time under attack by the Honeyeaters and a gathering crowd of other birds churring alarm from the wattles.

I should have stayed but involuntarily arose and approached the scene. The Butcherbird picked itself up from yet another fall and perched on its prey facing me defiantly for a moment and then flew off into cover, I examined the Quail. It was dead. The marks of the two blows to the head were quite distinct but bloodless. They must have killed the Quail instantly. The skin of the stomach was torn open slightly.

The Butcherbird had been offered a veritable smorgasbord of birds yet had chosen this prey almost as large as itself, a cause for wonder. On consideration though it became apparent the Quail was a good strategic choice. Most of the birds were feeding amid the tangled branches of the wattles. They would have been difficult to approach and immune from surprise attack. The ground feeders, such as the Peaceful Dove, the Speckled Warbler and the Double-barred Finches are always alert and quick to fly whereas the Quail prefers to squat or just quietly walk away from trouble. Whilst watching this particular pair I noticed they seldom raised their head from feeding and apparently never surveyed for threat above the ground level. Coming from behind with an unobstructed flight approach the Butcherbird could strike with complete surprise. The relatively wide, flat back of the Quail even provides a platform from which to strike the death blows. I suspect Quails may be a frequent choice of prey by the Butcherbird.

## GREAT-BILLED HERON AT YAMBA

A. GIBSON

While birdwatching with Mrs. Marjorie Innes of Angourie, on 23 April 1980 in the vicinity of Romiaka Channel, 5 km south of Yamba, we observed and identified a Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana*. Yamba is on the New South Wales north coast and Romiaka Channel is on the south side of the Clarence River estuary.

The day was clear and sunny, with the bird resting on a mud bank approximately 110 m distant from our observation point; the binoculars that I was using at the time were Leitz Trinovid 10 x 40B. Field notes compiled at the time of the observation, record the following:—

**Bill:** length between 200 mm - 225 mm (8-8½ inches), straight on top and bottom and pointed to the tip. The colour was grey although this may have been because the bird had been probing in the mud, and the gape colour was yellow. **Body Colour:** generally dark grey, back feathers anthracite grey, with rufous-brown lights shining in the sunlight, flank feathers light grey. Neck long with a few long feathers pale in colour similar to that of a Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*. **Legs:** greenish-grey. **Iris:** yellow, with the naked skin around the eye, also yellow. **Length:** approx. 100 cms. There was a pronounced lump at the occipital base of the cranium which could be as a result of bone structure or feathers.

During the period of observation, the bird was immobile and not feeding: it was supposed that it could either be sick or exhausted as it occupied the one position for some twenty minutes.

On the same mud bank with the bird were for comparison purposes Bar-tailed Godwits *Limosa lapponica*, Silver Gulls *Larus novaehollandiae*, and Black-fronted Plovers *Charadrius melanops*, while on the opposite side of the Channel from the observation point were Pacific Herons *Ardea pacifica* and White-faced Herons *A. novaehollandiae*.

The bird subsequently flew to a mud bank further up the channel and then disappeared into the mangroves. No white patches were noticeable in the wing, a feature of both adult and juvenile Black-necked Storks *Xenorhynchus asiaticus*.

In view of the limited distribution of the Great-billed Heron in eastern Australia as given by P. Slater (1970 *A Field Guide to Aust. Birds* Vol. 1) and N. Cayley (1968 *What Bird is That?* 5th Ed.), I discussed the identification with the staff of the ornithology section of the Australian Museum. It had been put to me that the bird observed could have been a juvenile Black-necked Stork (or Jabiru).

After discussion of the diagnostic features of both birds, it was evident to me that compared to my observation of the supposed Great-billed Heron, the juvenile Black-necked Stork is of larger dimensions; has a much heavier bone structure; the bill is black, and the lower mandible of the bill is arched and is much more heavier; the legs are longer and red in colour.



Local people claim that the Great-billed Heron has been seen in the Clarence River estuary on previous occasions, even as late as last year. While the species has not been listed for New South Wales by Morris et al (1981 *Handlist of Birds in New South Wales*) my attention has been drawn to an early reference by E.P. Ramsay (1877 *Proc. Zool. Soc. London* p.341). In the article, in which Ramsay converses about the birds of the Rockingham Bay area in Queensland, he mentions in passing "I have observed them as far south as the Clarence River, where the late Mr. John Macgillivray obtained a specimen from New South Wales. As the condition of the bird observed on 23 April 1980, indicated, it could well be that an earlier weather pattern forced it south from its known habitat.

I wish to record my thanks to Walter Boles and the staff of the Australian Museum, for their assistance in compiling this note.

ALMA GIBSON, 17 Hilma Avenue, Collaroy Plateau, N.S.W. 2098.



*Western Warbler by L.C. Haines*

## CORRIGENDUM

The following corrections should be made in the article "Little and Forest Ravens in New South Wales" by S.J.S. Debus (1980 *Aust. Birds* **15**, 7-12).

P. 7, para. 2 line 2 : "*Tasmanicus*" should read "*tasmanicus*".

P. 10, para. 3 lines 5-6 : "inland coastal" should read "inland and coastal".

P. 10, para. 3 line 8 : "scrap" should read "scarp".

The following corrections should be made to the article "The Inland occurrence of Tropicbirds in New South Wales, March 1978" by A. K. Morris (1979, *Aust. Birds* **13**, 51-54),

P. 51, para. 4 line 6 : the line should read "Immature male found alive at "Girraween", Coonabarabran, now AM 0.46743", not Warrumbungle National Park as stated in text.

The Editor.



## SHADING AND SUNNING IN EAGLES

S.J.S. DEBUS

Further to Larkins (1979, 1980) and Baldwin (1980), I offer the following on shading and sunning behaviour in eagles. Ellis (1979) described the sun-spread posture of Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, in which the birds spread their wings and tail when exposed to direct solar radiation. This posture was considered to be an attempt to absorb radiant energy. The cooling wing-droop posture (seen in many birds) was adopted when the eagles became overheated. Occasionally eaglets were seen to pant as well as sun-spread, and were thought to be either still irradiating their plumage although mildly overheated, or were attempting to dissipate heat as in the wing-droop posture. Shading was thought by Ellis to be derived from sun-spreading. When shading, an adult "offered" shelter to its young, but the young had to move into the female's shadow. The adult normally raised the body feathers slightly when shading, perhaps making additional skin surface available for heat loss. As in wing-drooping, adults oriented back-to-sun. When adults became overheated they adopted the wing-droop posture and ultimately left the eyrie. Shading was therefore thought to be influenced by environmental stimuli and the internal state of the adult.

I have observed shading and sunning behaviour in the Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides* at Armidale, New South Wales in spring and summer 1980. In mid-November at one nest containing a small downy chick, the female stood back-to-sun so that her shadow fell on the nest. She did this for at least 3.5 hours from 09:50 on a warm sunny morning, but did not adopt any special posture. This nest was partly shaded in the top of a living *Pinus radiata*. At another nest in mid-December, the female was already standing back-to-sun on the nest at 08:10 on a hot sunny morning. The large feathered young, which she had already fed, moved and sat in her shadow. At about 08:40, apparently after a certain level of stimulus was reached, the adult sun-spread for 2-3 minutes, thus casting a larger shadow on the nest. She did not appear to be reacting to the young in any way, but rather to the sun. She then head-scratched, preened and gaped, and at 08:45 left for a shaded perch nearby.

The eaglet at this second nest was seen to sun-spread briefly on two occasions: once at about 09:40 during a bout of preening, when it was large and downy with wing, tail and mantle feathers sprouting; once at 08:30 when it was almost fledged.

Ellis's data and my observations support the view that shading is involuntary, performed in response to the adult's genetic programming and environmental releasers, rather than to any distress or other signals from the eaglet(s).

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## PIRACY OF NEST MATERIAL AMONG TREE MARTINS

TONY STOKES

As very little seems to have been written on the behaviour of Tree Martins *Cecropis nigrig-ans*, the following observation may be of interest.

At 12:35 hours on 2 September 1981 I watched many Tree Martins at the Mootwingie Historic Site, 85 km north-east of Broken Hill, New South Wales, pick up small broken pieces of leaves in their bills near water on the gravel road and fly with them to River Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* lining a waterway where, presumably, they were nesting.

On one occasion a bird flew from the road with a piece of leaf and was chased by three others who flew from nearby. Two pursuers ceased after about 30m but the third persisted and at about 50m the leading bird dropped the leaf particle. The remaining pursuer dived to pick it up in its bill before it reached the ground and then flew with it to the gum trees. I interpreted this as piracy of nest material.

A similar report was given by Mollison and Green (1962 *Emu* 61, 227-280) of an instance of Tree Martins mandibulating small particles, possibly pebbles or charcoal, while on the ground. Some carried short straws aloft ". . . . only to be dropped from about 20 ft up." In that case however the activity does not seem to have been related to nesting.

The species is well known to deposit its eggs on mattress of dried leaves or other vegetation T. Kloot & E.M. McCulloch (1980 *Birds of Australian Gardens*) and G. Beruldsen (1980 *A Field guide to nests and eggs of Australian birds*). Almost certainly they were beginning to breed in the area as were many other species after the recent heavy winter rains e.g. nests and eggs were found of the Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla*, Welcome Swallow *Hirundo neoxena*, Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla harmonica*, Apostlebird *Struthidea cinerea*, Red-capped Robin *Petroica goodenovii*, Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* and the White-browed Babbler *Pomatostomus superciliosus*.

TONY STOKES, Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 636, Canberra City, A.C.T. 2601.



## PLUMED WHISTLING DUCK BREEDING IN COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND

### A. COLEMANE

During December 1971 a flock of over 200+ Plumed Whistling Ducks *Dendrocygna eytoni* appeared on Pitt Town Common, near Windsor. This was a rare visitation, as only isolated records of this species were previously known in the County of Cumberland. This flock gradually increased during 1971 and 1972, until over 300 were observed at Rickaby's Creek on part of Windsor golf links, in July 1973. Since that irruption, varying numbers have been recorded on the many swamps in the Hawkesbury area. At present, a large flock seems to be congregating at the ponds near Killarney Stud and feed among horses in the field. This site is near North Richmond, a little to the north-east lies Bushes' or Fearnley's Lagoon, a long stretch of water surrounded by cultivated land, the only trees are a few Weeping Willows, at the western end. For most of the year, various crops are planted on the alluvial soil and when the harvesting has been completed, weed growth takes over for a few months.

It was one of these periods in April 1981 when I visited Bushes' Lagoon, and searched the area to note species present. I caught a glimpse of a Whistling Duck gliding through some water-weeds close to an earth bank 15 m out. A slight movement to the right of me aroused my curiosity, so with a quick focus on the spot with the binoculars, I was amazed and delighted at what I saw, it was four young ducklings huddled together in the sedges. Quietly sitting down on the bank, I awaited results. It wasn't long before the female Whistling Duck came gliding back through the reeds with head held low and giving a couple of chip, chip, calls which altered the ducklings, who immediately swam out to meet the mother.

Then off they all went, very quietly swimming along the blind side of the sedges, and finally into open water where excellent views were obtained. This was a terrific moment for me, as I had been hoping to find them breeding long before this.

The following week they were still there, and another pair with well grown young, so at least two pairs bred there while long grass was ideal cover for breeding. This was an excellent record for the County, however, I had to settle for second observations. This was because Albert Cartwright of Riverstone had recorded two young, just feathered at the McGarth's Hill Treatment Ponds on 12 February 1979, that being the first breeding record for the County of Cumberland. Numbers of over 100 are still recorded in the vicinity of Bushes' Lagoon, and Killarney Stud. It would appear that the Plumed Whistling Duck will become part of the Hawkesbury birdlife in the future, if the present habitat survives destruction.

ATHOL COLEMANE, 7 Redbank Place, Northmead, N.S.W. 2152.

## OBITUARY – GEORGE DIBLEY

The Club lost a stalwart when George Dibley died on 28th March last.

George was a Design Draughtsman by profession and had spent a number of years in the employ of Bernard Smith Ltd.

George came to bird watching rather late in life but had always been a lover of outdoors and the bush and had been a member of Sydney Bush Walkers for 52 years. Although he had had the casual interest in birds most outdoor people have he did not take up organised bird watching and ornithology until 1961 when he joined the R.Z.S. He was subsequently Secretary of this Section and its Chairman for several years. He joined the R.A.O.U. at the same time and attended many R.A.O.U. congresses in Victoria, Northern Territory, New Guinea and New Zealand as well as in New South Wales.

George was a foundation member of the Gould League of Bird Watchers later to be known as The N.S.W. Field Ornithologists Club and from its inception in 1968 was assistant field day organiser and later field day organiser. When a foundation President was appointed in August 1970 George was its first and remained in the chair until August 1974 when he retired as chairman but took over the position of Treasurer which he held until his retirement from committee work in December 1979.

During his involvement with the Club he represented it on the Australian Museum Keith Hindwood Memorial Fund in 1971 and was instrumental in the presentation of a special series of talks in 1977. He took part in John Disney's Survey of Birds of the Pine Forest in 1973 and was a participator in the Botany Bay Wader Survey. Apart from these functions George and Marie did many other things for the Club of which members would not generally be aware.

When overseas visitors were here George and Marie either took them out or put them in touch with other people who could do so. For years they also prepared the journal for posting and delivered them to Mortdale Post Office and Members will note that their return address is still on our envelopes.

Although George was a distinguished black and white photographer in his early days he never took up bird photography but contented himself with becoming expert in identification of birds and their calls in which vocation his acute well trained ears were an invaluable help to other people.

Apart from having been to many field outings and camp outs with the Dibleys I had the privilege of serving on committee with George for some ten years. As I have said before if there was anything to be done it seemed to be the norm to have the Dibleys do it and the amount of time and energy expended by both George and Marie in these endeavours is beyond calculation. When they both stepped down from office in 1979 they left the Club in a very sound position both financially and as to membership. George was always a very thorough and conscientious Treasurer and well aware of the financial commitments of the Club, particularly having in mind its comparatively small membership.

When George and Marie retired from committee they were presented by the Club with a volume on *Water Fowl of the World* which could only be described as a small token of the esteem in which they were held and in acknowledgement of their services.

To Marie we extend our heartfelt sympathy.

JIM FRANCIS.



## BOOK REVIEWS

**BIRDS OF AUSTRALIAN GARDENS** Paintings by Peter Trusler with text by Tess Kloot and Ellen McCulloch, 1980. Rigby Publishers Ltd., Adelaide. Pp 192. Col p11 80. 355 x 265 mm \$29.95.

Concurrently with the increasing interest among Australian gardeners over the last twenty years in growing native plants, there has been increasing interest in attracting and maintaining populations of native birds in the garden. Two excellent books are now available which detail many ways in which this can be done: Barbara Salter's 'Australian Native Gardens and Birds' (Ure Smith, Sydney, 1977) and George Adams' 'Birdscaping Your Garden' (Rigby, Adelaide, 1980). That the interest in garden birds is such as to prompt the publication of these books and of 'Birds of Australian Gardens' is a very pleasing sign for the future of birds in suburbia.

'Birds of Australian Gardens' is a portfolio of 80 full page paintings by Peter Trusler of 99 common garden birds from ten Australian cities: Darwin, Townsville, Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Alice Springs and Perth. Each painting is accompanied by a page of text on the birds portrayed compiled by Tess Kloot and Ellen McCulloch. This consists of general information on habits, plumage, distribution and habitat, followed by brief notes under a series of headings: distribution (in relation to the ten cities mentioned above), length, alternative names, food, nest, voice and notes. Under the last heading suggestions are made on aspects of the bird's life-history which are little-known and hence worth following up.

There is also an eight page introduction before the paintings. This covers ways in which birds can be attracted to the garden, including details of how to make self-filling nectar feeders, 'bird puddings' (which are puddings made for birds, not of them) and nest boxes. Methods for reducing the problems of cats, pesticides and birds flying into windows are mentioned, and there is a general section on bird-watching. The introduction is illustrated throughout with black-and-white drawings. At the back of the book are lists of bird-attracting garden plants, bird books and clubs, and suggested areas to visit within an hour's drive of the city centres.

In tackling a series of paintings all of well-known birds, Peter Trusler has shown great courage. It is generally paintings of less familiar birds which have most appeal. With very familiar birds I find any slight failure of the artists to quite catch the look and character of the bird detracts greatly from my appreciation of the painting. In this case, however, almost without exception the artist has exactly captured the bird. He has also had great success in portraying the strength and colour of Australian sunlight. Even such paintings as the one of sparrows on a roof have a surprisingly Australian feel.

To focus attention on the subject of each painting while still representing an entire scene, Peter Trusler has generally painted his birds against a background of sky or has blurred the background to give a somewhat photographic impression. For the birds themselves, however, and their immediate surroundings, his accuracy and attention to detail are delightful. He states at the beginning of the book that all the backgrounds and plants were painted from actual specimens and that a number of the paintings are in fact portraits of individual birds. Particular favourites of mine are the Red-rumped Parrots, the Crested Shrike-tit and the Grey Butcherbird, but there are many arresting and beautiful paintings in the collection.

The book's main shortcoming is a tendency to use techniques more suited to field guides. The least successful paintings by far are those which portray groups of similar species, such as pardalotes or small lorikeets. These unnatural groupings of birds take away much of the realism which is so much of the appeal in the other paintings. The book by no means covers all the birds likely to be encountered in Australian gardens. Pointing out plumage differences between for instance the Swift Parrot and the four small lorikeet species should be left to the field guides.

The notes on each species are also written as if the book were a field guide and the object was to summarise as much information as possible in a limited space. I cannot help feeling that a more anecdotal, more personal approach, expanding on points of particular interest, would have been more suitable and made the text more readable. Certainly lack of space was not a consideration as in many cases the notes only take up about half the page available to them.



The list of suggested garden plants at the back of the book is not a particularly good one, judging by the section devoted to Sydney. In terms of number of flowers produced, length of flowering period and range of bird species attracted, there are a number of other plants which would be far preferable to most of those mentioned. Species such as *Grevillea banksii*, *Melaleuca hypericifolia* and *Erythrina indica* would certainly be better than for example *Grevillea buxifolia*, an insect-pollinated species which I have never seen visited by a honeyeater.

Nevertheless, the exceptional quality of the paintings more than makes up for the few shortcomings in the text. I would strongly recommend the book to all those with an interest in birds and bird painting.

PETER SMITH.

**LEARNING ABOUT AUSTRALIAN BIRDS** by Rosemary Balmford. Published by Collins — March 1981. Price \$16.95. Review copy supplied by William Collins Pty. Limited, Sydney.

The foreword suggests that the book is intended to help beginners in ornithology in Australia. In fact it will do much more than that. The simplest way to show the breadth of coverage is by listing the names of the chapters.

1. Where and when to look at birds
2. What bird is that?
3. Attracting birds
4. Expeditions and holidays
5. What to watch for
6. What to record
7. Studying birds in the field
8. The bird in the hand
9. Institutions and organisations
10. Research
11. Classification and naming
12. Evolution
13. Birds past and present

The book is very clearly written and contains a wealth of information useful for all bird watchers.

The only statement in the book I do not agree with relates to bird photography where it is stated that "the longer lens had a very much reduced depth of field". In my opinion the only factors affecting depth of field (for reduction ratios useful in bird photography) are aperture and reduction ratio. The book is illustrated with drawings by Phyllis Plant and eight pages of colour photographs. An extensive and useful list of books and papers for "further reading" is included. My conclusion is that this book would be useful addition to the library of any bird watcher and almost essential for a beginner.

I would suggest that any aspiring bird watcher buys this book before any other book or equipment.

KIK LISSER.

## NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS

Contributors are requested to observe the following points when submitting articles and notes for publication.

1. Species, names, and the order in which they occur are to be in accordance with "Handlist of Birds in New South Wales". A.K.Morris, A.R.McGill and G. Holmes 1981 Dubbo: NSWFOC.
2. Articles or notes should be typewritten if possible and submitted in duplicate. Double spacing is required.
3. Margins of not less than 25mm width at the left hand side and top, with similar of slightly smaller at the right hand side of pages.
4. No underlinings and no abbreviations except as shown in the examples.
5. Photographs should be glossy finish and not too small.
6. The *Style Manual*, Commonwealth Government Printing Office, Canberra (1966) and subsequent editions will be the guide for this Journal.
7. Diagrams should be on plain white paper drawn with india ink. Any lettering is to be 'professional style' or lightly pencilled.
8. Dates must be written "1 January 1975" except in tables and figures where they may be abbreviated.
9. The 24-hour clock will be used, times being written 06:30, 18:30 for 6.30 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. respectively.
10. Mr, Mrs, Dr are not followed by a full stop.
11. In text, numbers one to ten are spelt; numbers of five figures or more should be grouped in threes and spaced by a thin gap. Commas should not be used as thousands markers.
12. References to other articles should be shown in the text—'...B.W. Finch and M.D. Bruce (1974) stated...' and under heading

### REFERENCES

Finch, B.W. and M.D. Bruce 1974 The Status of the Blue Petrel in Australian Waters  
Aust. Birds **9**, 32–35

13. Acknowledgements to other individuals should include Christian names or initials.

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