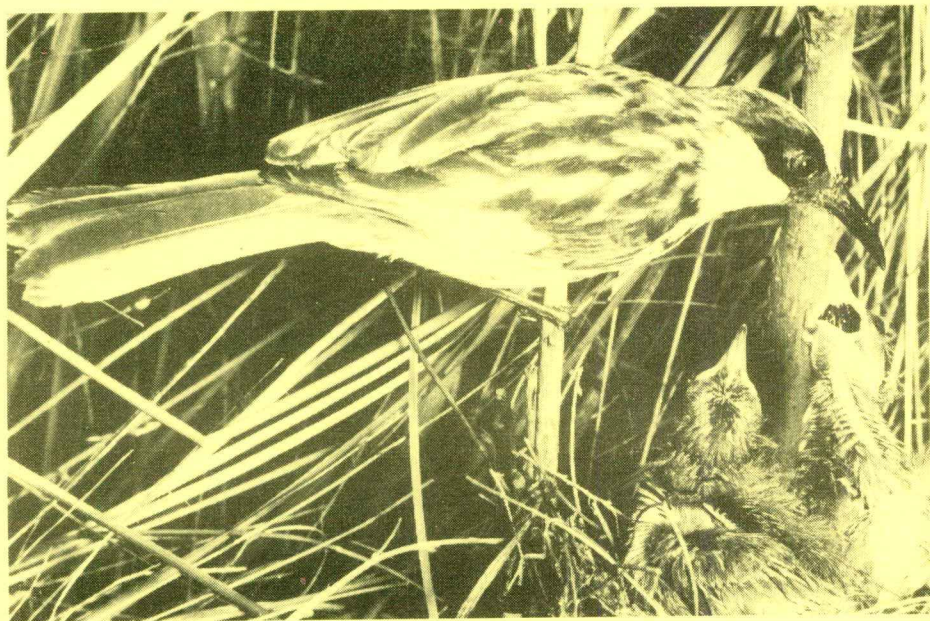


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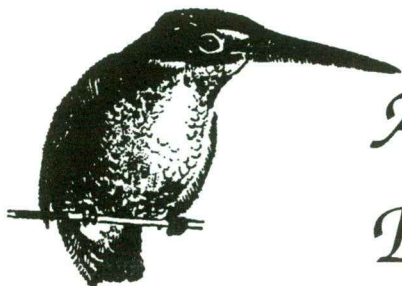
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# AUSTRALIAN BIRDS

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## SOOTY OWLS IN THE HACKING RIVER CATCHMENT

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### SUMMARY

Observations on the Sooty Owl *Tyto tenebricosa* from the Hacking River catchment in central NSW are summarised. From these data we conclude that in 2500 ha of suitable habitat, there are at least five and possibly six pairs of Sooty Owl. They occupy a median home range of 500 ha and prey on a diverse prey assemblage of terrestrial, scansorial and arboreal mammals. The self-contained, isolated nature of the Hacking River catchment is discussed in the context of offspring dispersal, and usefulness of the area for ecological comparisons with other small catchment areas managed for timber harvesting.

### INTRODUCTION

On 11 January 1992 S. & J. Sansom disturbed a Sooty Owl roosting near a shallow cave near Audley in the Royal National Park, New South Wales (Morris & Chafer 1992). Although it is well known by Sydney-based bird watchers that Sooty Owls reside in the Royal NP, and can often be found along the Hacking River, few data have been published on the Sooty Owl's ecology or biology, other than sight records in various unusual sighting reports and annual bird reports. Here we record their known



distribution along the Hacking River and its tributaries, postulate a median home range area, estimate a population for the river catchment and record the results of two incidental collections of dietary data and other behavioural observations.

The Hacking River is a relatively short watercourse only 28 km in length. Its headwaters rise in the Hawkesbury sandstone of the Woronora Plateau, approximately 2 km west of Stanwell Tops (34°12'S, 150°57'E). The river flows easterly through Triassic sandstones for approximately 3 km before reaching an escarpment at Kellys Falls where it descends 110 metres through Narrabeen Shales, Permian coal measures, carbonaceous siltstones and volcanics. The river continues easterly for another kilometre before it turns and flows through a shallow gorge in a northerly direction for the remaining 25 km of its length, entering the Pacific Ocean via Port Hacking.

Below the escarpment, a luxuriant growth of closed forest and tall open forest encompasses the river gorge, extending up most of the river's short tributaries. Much of the Hacking River is within the boundaries of the Royal National Park, and 10 km of the river valley is traversed by Lady Carrington Drive, now a closed roadway. A general description of the Royal National Park and its avifauna can be found in Bransbury (1987).

## METHODS

Twenty one irregular nocturnal visits were made by us along Lady Carrington Drive, Royal NP between 1985-92. Each census consisted of walking along Lady Carrington Drive for three to four kilometres from the southern entrance (twice from the northern entrance) on or about dusk. Approximately one to two hours after dusk we walked back to the start of the track listening and spotlighting for owls and nocturnal mammals. Various other interested persons often accompanied us. On only one occasion were tape recordings of owl calls used to attract a response. A vehicle was used to traverse eight km of the track on one occasion.

Seven recent casual observations of Sooty Owls within the Hacking River catchment, but outside of the Royal National Park, made by observers known to the authors (R. Jordan, M. Ooi, D. Rayment pers. comm.), are also included in the analysis. We calculated the total available suitable habitat and home range size from a 1:30 000 scale topographic map and familiarity with the vegetation of the river catchment. Suitable habitat for Sooty Owl (cf. Hollands 1991, Kavanagh 1992, Debus in press) is defined as tall open forest with elements of tall closed forest, or tall open forest with a closed forest subcanopy. In this note a territory refers to the inferred home range occupied by a pair of Sooty Owls.

## RESULTS

### *Observations*

We observed Sooty Owl on ten of our 21 censuses along Lady Carrington Drive. From these data and the Audley record above we suggest at least three pairs of Sooty Owl occur along the lower Hacking River. These three pairs have territories centred about Audley, Karoga Brook and Bola Creek. In the upper catchment territories exist along Wilsons Creek and Herbert Creek (R. Jordan, M. Ooi and D. Rayment pers. comm.). Thus within the catchment of the Hacking River, we have estimated from the limited data available, that at least five Sooty Owl territories are currently in use.

On 14 November 1985, CJC and D. Fischer observed two birds flying along the Hacking River near Palona Brook. Both birds were calling, using the 'falling bomb' call (Fleay 1968), which Beruldsen (1986) and Hollands (1991) regard as a contact call. Upon landing in trees adjacent to us, the Owls began and continued to use a soft 'conversational chatter' to each other for nearly ten minutes, before moving on.

On 7 September 1991 in company with A.R. Davis & D. Andrew, CJC observed the Bola Creek and Karoga Brook pairs on the same night about 40 minutes (6 km) apart. Although it is possible that they were the same birds, we did not think this likely as the second pair (Karoga Brook) behaved differently, and a Sooty Owl call was recorded on a tape recorder, which had been left at the first location (Bola Creek), approximately 30 minutes after we had departed that site. The Karoga Brook pair was first heard calling in a manner recalling Masked Owl *Tyto novaehollandiae*, i.e. similar to the harsh screech of a Paradise Riflebird *Ptiloris paradiseus* as described by Debus (1990). The birds called like this for some minutes before suddenly changing to the falling bomb call. Both birds were involved in the duet and fell silent after two or three calls. A similar scenario has been reported by Beruldsen (1986) from south-east Queensland.

On six of the ten observations of Sooty Owls along the lower Hacking, two birds were observed together at or about dusk. As taped playback calls were only used once to attract the birds, we postulate that this behaviour may be referable to roost-departure contact behaviour. This data supports the suggestion that members of a pair of Sooty Owl always roost apart from each other during the day (cf. Schodde & Mason 1980).

Sideways 'Yellow Robin-like' perching on tree trunks (with one foot above the other and the body horizontal) has also been observed by us twice. Although Hollands (1991) has observed this behaviour frequently for Lesser Sooty Owl *Tyto multipunctata*, he regards it as being less common with *T. tenebricosa*.



### *Territories*

We estimate that approximately 2500 hectares of suitable Sooty Owl habitat exists within the Hacking River catchment. We consider that at least 5 pairs of Owls inhabit the catchment, with a median home range per pair of 500 hectares, assuming all habitat is used and no overlap of territories occurs. This would still allow for the occasional subadult to also hold a foraging space within the catchment, perhaps in marginal habitat.

### *What happens to offspring?*

Considering the geographic position of the Royal NP, dispersal of offspring outside the Hacking River catchment is restricted in the options available. In the eastern portion of the Royal National Park, suitable habitat exists on the eastern slopes of Garrawarra Ridge. Approximately 450 hectares of closed and open forest would provide enough area for one or perhaps a pair of Sooty Owls, though we know of no casual observations from this location. To the north and east of the river lie suburban Sydney and the Pacific Ocean respectively. To the west is Heathcote National Park and a military reserve which largely consists of dry open eucalypt forest and heathland. To the south lies the Illawarra escarpment, which provides a reasonably continuous belt of mixed closed and tall open forest for nearly 80 km south to Nowra. This southern corridor, would appear to offer the main avenue for dispersing Sooty Owls, although a westward movement through drier forest cannot be completely ruled out (cf. Hollands 1991, Debus in press).

### *Prey*

Although much recent data has been collected on Sooty Owl dietary preference (Hollands 1991, Kavanagh 1992, Lundie-Jenkins 1993, Debus in press), it is worth expanding on this data base to further understand the ecological requirements of the Sooty Owl as a specialised forest hunter.

We returned to the Audley roost-site mentioned at the start of this note on 25 July 1992, one of us (MA) having been in company with the original observers. We checked the shallow sandstone cave and found no evidence of occupation. Extensive investigation around the adjacent sandstone outcrop revealed the presence of a casual roost site under a sandstone overhang. The open, recessed ledge was approximately 300 mm high, 400 mm deep and 3 metres long, and is roughly concave in shape. The site was generally damp, except for the inferred roost-site which was dry. The Owl was not present, however eight moulted primary and secondary feathers were sufficient evidence of occupancy. Also present were two relatively intact pellets and two decomposed pellets that were scattered about. Later examination of the pellets using methods described in Chafer (1992), and subsequent comparison with reference material and Watts & Aslin (1981), indicated that each pellet contained the remains of one black rat *Rattus rattus* (total = 4 rats).

In September and October 1989, T. Grant collected several pellets from a Sooty

Owl roost site near Wilsons Creek, Helensburgh. The pellets were sent to CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research by R. Jordan and identified by J. Calaby and G. Pfitzer as remains from brown antechinus *Antechinus stuartii*, common ringtail possum *Pseudocheirus peregrinus*, sugar glider *Petaurus breviceps*, mountain brushtail possum *Trichosurus caninus* and long-nosed bandicoot *Perameles nasuta*. Sooty Owls have subsequently been recorded breeding from this area (R. Jordan pers. comm).

## DISCUSSION

At least five pairs of Sooty Owl are inferred from the above data to currently reside in the Hacking River catchment. Furthermore we suggest that this approximates the carrying capacity of the river catchment, given the amount of suitable habitat available, and the estimated median home range required for a resident pair of Sooty Owls (Schodde & Mason 1981).

Like Beruldsen (1986) and Hollands (1991), we verify that the diagnostic falling bomb call is given in flight, and that both birds use this call in a duet-like performance, both in flight and perched. Similarly a Masked Owl-like screech is occasionally used by Sooty Owls, and may be mistaken for that species under certain circumstances. Thus care in identifying the Masked Owl by call alone is required, and may be subject to error if Sooty Owls also occupy the area. The range of mammals recorded in the Hacking River diet also adds to the knowledge of the dietary requirements of the Sooty Owl, and indicates that it may prey equally on arboreal, scansorial and terrestrial mammals (cf. Lundie-Jenkins 1993). That three large forest owls, Sooty, Masked and Powerful *Ninox strenua*, occupy the forest area along the Hacking River (Chafer 1992) is similar to the findings of other workers who also acknowledge their apparent co-existence (Hyem 1979, Beruldsen 1986, O'Brien 1990, Hollands 1991, Davey 1993, Kavanagh 1992, Kavanagh & Peake 1993, S.J.S. Debus pers. comm.) and suggests that these three species cohabit the same foraging space without displaying any apparent adverse effects of interspecific competition. Intuitively this would be acceptable if resource partitioning were taking place, i.e. each species of owl was preying on different sized mammals. The available evidence suggests that this may be occurring. Chafer (1992) identified common ringtail possum and birds as the main prey of the Powerful Owl in the Hacking catchment, and subsequent data collection by the present authors complements this view (unpublished data). Debus & Rose (1993) conclude that scansorial and terrestrial mammals are the main prey of Masked Owls in New South Wales (no local data are available). The data reported herein suggests that Sooty Owls take a wide range of arboreal, scansorial and terrestrial mammals, though further data are required to confirm this (also see Lundie-Jenkins 1993).

One of the greatest potential threats to large forest owls in eastern Australia is forest fragmentation and degradation from the effects of logging, urbanization, altered



fire regimes and habitat clearance (Gill 1975, Kavanagh in Lunney 1991, Debus 1993 and in press, Debus & Rose 1993). The long term effects this may have on both avian and mammalian populations are thought to be detrimental (Saunders 1985, Fox & Fox 1987, Lunney 1987, 1991) though no comparative studies on these attributes have been compiled. Current studies being undertaken in northeastern and southeastern State Forests (R. Kavanagh & S.J.S. Debus pers. comm.) may partially resolve these questions, though the primary goal of sustainable biodiversity is to maintain viable breeding populations of both the avian predators and their mammalian prey (eg. Carey et al. 1992). In order to understand the complex relationship of predator and prey, land managers need to appreciate and understand the factors that influence habitat selection of both the owls and their vertebrate prey. We suggest here that one method of accomplishing this is to compare the distribution and environmental parameters pertaining to forest owls in areas managed for forestry and for wildlife. The self-contained nature of The Royal National Park and the Hacking River catchment, coupled with the relatively high density of forest owls within its bounds would make an ideal study area for comparison with small river catchment areas managed for forestry practices.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank Richard Jordan, Mark Ooi, David Rayment, Jim Francis and Chris Brandis for freely supplying us with details of their unpublished observations. Comments on a draft of this paper from Stephen Debus, Rod Kavanagh, and an anonymous referee improved its content and readability.

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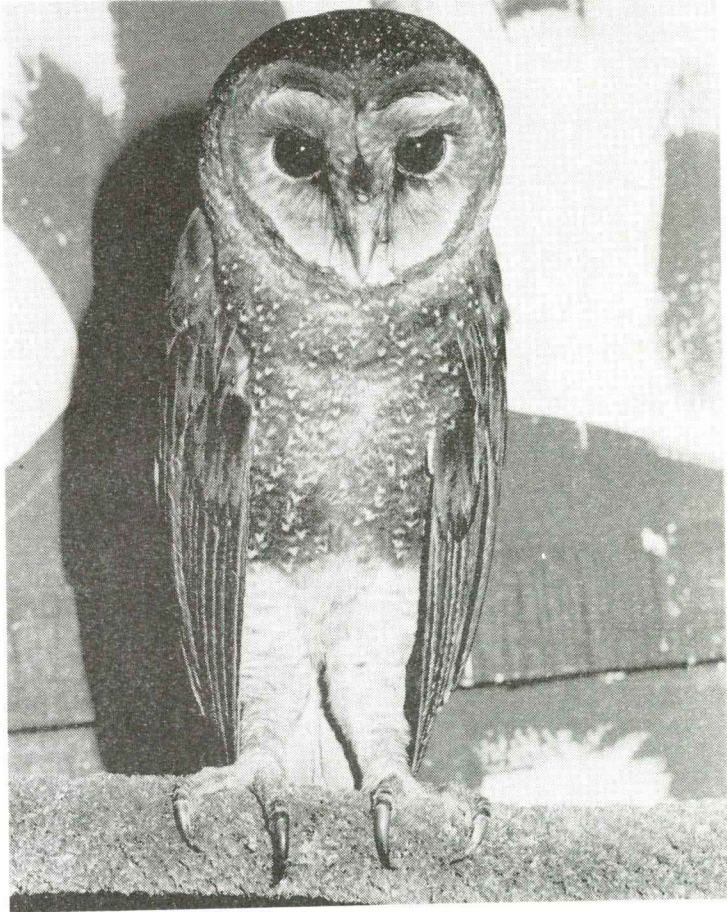
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## Epilogue

Royal National Park was affected by a major bushfire in January 1994, early reports stating that more than 95% of the vegetation was destroyed. However most of the rainforest around Bola Creek was unburnt and two Sooty Owls have been seen and heard nearby.



### Sooty Owl

This bird, an adult male, was found beside the Princes Highway at Engadine on 23 December 1993, apparently suffering from concussion. He was released after four days at Audley in Royal National Park and flew off strongly.

PHOTO: Richard Jackson

## SUNBIRD AT COFFS HARBOUR

S. G. LANE

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On 30 September 1993 Antoinette Perry rang to ask me if it was possible for her to have seen a male Yellow-bellied Sunbird in a garden in Coffs Harbour NSW. She was sure this was the bird she had seen but when she checked the *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds* (which features the bird conspicuously on the dust cover) and her field guide she found that Coffs Harbour was well south of the recorded distribution of the species. She asked me if there was any other bird with which it could have been mistaken.

I see no reason to doubt her identification, as she was "within a couple of metres of the bird while it hovered frequently in front of flowering shrubs, completely ignoring visitors to the garden at the time". I visited the garden twice — for a little over an hour early on 1 October 1993 and again, for about 40 minutes, early the following morning but was not able to find the bird. No further sightings have been reported to date

There are some earlier records of the Yellow-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis* for New South Wales. The first definite record is a report (*The Bird Observer* 651:26, April 1986) of nesting at Hawks Nest in November 1985. The same issue refers to a reported sighting on 10 December 1985 at Stroud, about 40 km north-west of Hawks Nest. The 1985 NSW Bird Report (*Aust Birds* 22 p. 38, May 1989) records under Olive-backed Sunbird an apparently lone female, evidently the bird described above, nesting unsuccessfully at Hawks Nest and also states "an unconfirmed 1979 report exists for the Hastings River area", roughly 150 km north-east of Hawks Nest. The 1986 Bird Report (*Aust Birds* 23 p. 93, June 1990) indicated that "the female [above] revisited nest early Nov not seen since".

I thank Alan Morris for giving me the above references.

### N.S.W. Bird Reports

The 1992 Bird Report will be published in the next issue of *Australian Birds*, Volume 27, No. 4. This will effectively clear the backlog, thanks to the enormous efforts of Alan Morris and his helpers Andy Burton and Stuart Fairbairn.

The 1993 Report is scheduled for March, 1995 (Vol. 28, No. 3) and it is anticipated that future Annual Reports will appear in March each year.



## CURRAWONG CAPTURES JUVENILE PARDALOTE

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There are numerous reports of predation by Pied Currawongs *Strepera graculina* on small birds and their eggs and nestlings, but the methods used to hunt and capture birds capable of flight have yet to be described.

On 25 September 1993 I saw a juvenile Spotted Pardalote *Pardalotus punctatus* taken by a Pied Currawong within about 45 seconds of fledging. The nest was in my back garden at Mangerton (Wollongong), 450 mm above ground surrounded by reasonably dense vegetation. The dominant trees and shrubs within a radius of 25 m were lilly pilly, silky oak, liquid amber, pines and palms, privet, *Lantana camara*, camellias, wild ginger, ferns and *Pseudopanax ferox*. The victim's parents had been colour-banded previously and I was attempting to determine the precise date of fledging. At 0920 hours my attention was drawn to repeated calling by the Pardalotes near the nest. Upon investigation, I found a recently fledged juvenile (J1) in dense upper foliage about 4 m high and 10 m from the nest entrance. At 0928 h, J2 left the nest and flew 3 m upwards at an angle of 22°, perched momentarily, then about flew a further 8 m horizontally to the dense upper foliage in which J1 was perched. The parents, fledglings and remaining nestlings were still calling, repeatedly uttering a soft plaintive phrase 'wee-wee'. J3 left the nest entrance at 0944 h and flew c. 3 m almost vertically, perched momentarily, then flew c. 6 m horizontally. During this level flight the predatory Currawong flew into view and pursued J3 about half a metre behind, capturing the young Pardalote from the rear immediately when it landed on a branch in open foliage, c. 7 m from its siblings. The Currawong did not land to effect the capture after which it remained airborne and flew out of sight with J3 squeezed between the mandibles. Before the attack, the Currawong had been perched hidden from my view behind vegetation.

People who have handled adult Pied Currawongs will appreciate the magnitude of the compressive force that they can develop by squeezing between the mandibles. By comparison with the Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* or Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae*, that force on a human finger feels at least twice as strong (personal experience). Avian prey which is grasped in the bill would have little chance of survival.

This successful attack provides clues to some of the methods used by Pied Currawongs to hunt and kill avian prey capable of flight. Hunting strategies which may prove to be important are (1) location from repeated calling by prey, (2) approach from the rear, (3) selection of a bird with poor flight skills, and (4) attack from a concealed position.

There are very few published accounts describing, from direct observation, predation by currawongs, probably because it is a very transient phenomenon. Poiani (1991) described successful predation of two Bell Miner nestlings *Manorina melanophrys* by a Laughing Kookaburra in which the whole attack took less than eight seconds. Any other detailed accounts or descriptions of currawongs seen in the act of nest predation or taking birds capable of flight would contribute to our knowledge of how cracticids hunt and capture avian prey.

I would like to thank Richard Major for his assistance in preparation of this report.

## REFERENCE

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## NEST PREDATION BY A BLUE-TONGUED LIZARD

REG. ANGUS

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While observing birds foraging on flowering spikes of grasstrees *Xanthorhea arborea* in September 1991 a pair of White-cheeked Honeyeaters *Phylidonyris nigra* was noted behaving in an excited manner some 40 metres away. They were calling and fluttering in low scrub and appeared to be agitated.

Upon checking the area, a blue-tongued lizard *Tiliqua scincoides* was located investigating a White-cheeked Honeyeaters' nest in a dwarf apple *Angophora crassifolia* 150 mm above ground. The lizard used its front legs to support itself in the tree, then pushed and nudged the base of the nest. It was not possible to ascertain whether it was tearing at the bottom of the nest or merely pushing upwards and sideways with its 'snout'. Eventually it tipped two eggs over the side of the nest and ate them on the ground.

The Honeyeaters meanwhile gave continuous rasping alarm calls. They moved excitedly close to the head of the lizard which finally left the area still being harassed by the birds and without any further attention to the nest.

## BLACK-BREASTED BUZZARD RECORD AT ILUKA

GREG. P. CLANCY

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On 21 March 1981 I observed a large raptor at Iluka NSW which I identified at the time as a Black-breasted Buzzard (Black-breasted Kite) *Hamirostra melanosternon*. This identification was supported by John H. Young who also saw the bird. Young had had extensive experience with the species in northern Australia.

The bird was considered to be a Buzzard as its tail appeared to be square, it was very large and it had prominent white 'bulls-eyes' in the wings. There was some black streaking on the breast. This colouring is consistent with a young Black-breasted Buzzard. It was soaring on flat wings which were raised slightly as it glided into the wind. This observation was published in *Australian Birds* (Vol. 16 p. 64) in June 1982.

In subsequent years I have observed juvenile White-bellied Sea Eagles soaring on flat wings, and as they possess white bulls-eyes, dark streaking on the breast and tails that could at some angles appear square, I have wondered whether the Buzzard at Iluka might not have been, in fact, a juvenile Sea Eagle. This, coupled with the absence of any confirmed Buzzard sighting at or near Iluka since, casts some doubt on the identification.

A young Buzzard was found on the coast near Gosford in 1984 (NSW Bird Report for 1984, *Aust Birds* Vol. 20 p. 111) so the Iluka bird may well have been a straying Buzzard; however it would be best to treat the 1981 record with some doubt, considering it to be a 'probable' or 'possible' Buzzard record.

Some copies of Volume 27 Number 2 (September 1993) were printed with uneven margins. While this will not matter to most readers, it will cause problems for anybody attempting to bind a set of *Australian Birds*.

Members who intend to bind their magazines are invited to return their defective copies to the Club as soon as possible for a replacement.





**Black-breasted Buzzard (above, photo Reg Angus) and immature White-bellied Sea Eagle (below, photo Stan Scotchmer), showing the prominent white 'bulls-eyes'**

# REEF EGRET HARASSED BY YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS

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## SUMMARY

A sight record concerning the attack of a Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* on an Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* at Bass Point NSW is described. This may represent the first recorded observation of an albatross attempting to take a land-based bird.

## INTRODUCTION

The Yellow-nosed Albatross *Diomedea chlororhynchos* is a common visitor to pelagic waters off the Illawarra coastline of NSW during the austral winter. While in this region, it displays a distinct preference for foraging in the offshore and pelagic marine zones (Brandis et al. 1992, Wood 1992). It rarely approaches the shoreline, unlike other visiting albatross (Gibson 1989), and in five years of regular land-based seawatches off Wollongong\* and Bass Point (1982-87) I recorded it on only three occasions, and then only in rough weather (unpubl. data).

The Eastern Reef Egret is a scarce inhabitant of the Illawarra rocky shores (Gibson 1989), though it can be found on most rocky headlands on an irregular basis.

## THE OBSERVATION

On 24 August 1990, I led an ornithological outing of the Cumberland Bird Observers Club to the Bass Point area (34°36'S, 150°54'E), a site in which a diverse range of marine, freshwater and terrestrial habitats can be found within a five square kilometre area (Smith & Chafer 1987). During winter, seabirds often approach to within 50-100 metres of the headland during stormy weather, making Bass Point a particularly good observation point for sea watching.

During mid morning the group was positioned on the south side of the rocky headland, with superb views of a number of seabirds flying past the point in a stiff south westerly breeze. These included Black-browed and Shy Albatross *Diomedea*

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\* See Gibson (1989) for locations of places mentioned in this note.



*melanophrys* and *D. cauta*, Giant Petrels *Macronectes* spp., Fairy Prions *Pachyptila turtur* and Fluttering Shearwaters *Puffinus gavia*. An Eastern Reef Egret was also under observation as it foraged along the rocky shore.

The group's attention was attracted to a small albatross rounding the headland, subsequently identified as an adult Yellow-nosed Albatross. At the same time the Egret took flight and headed out to sea in a south westerly direction, making slow progress into the headwind. The Albatross was flying in a southerly direction when it veered to the west and headed in an intercept course towards the Egret. The Egret was apparently unaware of the impending attack until, at the last moment, the Albatross passed to the left and it took evasive action losing the altitude it had gained. The Albatross flew on, turned and headed back eastward toward the Egret which was continuing to struggle into the headwind. Again the Albatross 'buzzed' the Egret. Further evasive action saw the Egret lose more height, but it continued on in a south westerly direction. For a third time the Albatross turned and headed westward directly toward the Egret, effortlessly using the breeze to its advantage. This time on passing the Albatross lunged at the Egret with its bill, just missing its target. The Egret then veered towards the observing party, gained a little height and headed for shore, landing near its point of departure. The Albatross apparently lost interest at this point and flew off in a southerly direction.

## DISCUSSION

There was agreement between the observers that the attack on the Egret by the Albatross was deliberate, and we gained the impression that it was trying to force the Egret into the sea. This note possibly represents the first recorded observation of an albatross attempting to take a land-based bird. In the literature, I could find no evidence of a Yellow-nosed Albatross (or indeed any albatross) being reported as taking any type of landbird, and seabird remains found in albatross stomachs are thought to be primarily from scavenging carrion (Serventy et al. 1971, Lofgren 1984, Marchant & Higgins 1990, del Hoyo et al. 1992).

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## RAVEN CACHING FOOD

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While watching New Zealand fur seals at Cape du Couedic on the south-west coast of Kangaroo Island (South Australia) on 28 April 1993 I noticed a raven land on the steep slope below me. I was unable to determine the species with certainty, but consider it was probably a Little Raven *Corvus mellori*. It was carrying an object in its bill about 30 mm by 40 mm of a dark colour which I took to be a food item, possibly a piece of fish. It pushed the object into a crevice between two rocks and then moved a short distance and picked up a piece of rock which it placed over the object to cover it. This action was repeated with another piece of rock, all the while looking about to see if it was observed. Alan Morris (pers. com.) has observed Australian Ravens *C. coronoides* at Warrumbungle National Park pick up food items from the picnic area and hide them under grass clippings. However the Kangaroo Island bird was not only hiding the item but covering it as well.

## UNUSUAL PIGMENTATION IN A MAGPIE

GREG. P. CLANCY

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In August 1990 Sven Christiansen of Blaxlands Flat, north-east of Nymboida NSW, showed me a video tape of an unusually coloured Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen* that inhabited his backyard and surrounding bushland. The Magpie was generally much whiter than typical birds and had a pale bill.

This unusual bird was found dead at the same location on 24 August 1990 and the carcass was given to me for examination. The cause of death is not known. A detailed description of the plumage and soft parts was recorded as follows:

**Bill:** pale pink. **Gape flange:** pink. **Eye-ring:** skin, pink; feathers, whitish. **Lores:** off-white to buff. **Forehead, crown & ear coverts:** dirty white. **Nape:** white. **Mantle:** White, a few feathers broadly tipped black. **Upper back:** white. **Lower back & rump:** grey, whitish tips. **Upper tail coverts:** white, only a few present. **Upper tail:** basal half or more white, black centre shafts, distal black. **Chin & throat:** off white. **Upper breast:** white, some black mottling. **Lower breast & flanks:** predominantly black, edged grey, some whitish edges **Belly:** buff and white. **Primaries:** black, white bases to centre shafts. **Primary coverts:** nos 1 - 6 black with white basal leading edge, 7 - 10 black. **Secondary coverts:** white, with black sub-terminal fringe on nos 7 & 8. **Alula:** black. **Median coverts:** off-white **Lesser coverts:** white, centre shafts black. **Tarsus & toes:** blue-grey. **Claws:** white.

The carcass was forwarded to the Australian Museum where it was allocated Serial No. A101:FB4 and described as a 'partial albino' on the Museum Data Sheet. Examination at the Museum determined that it was an immature female with undeveloped ovaries and a straight, thin oviduct. The skull was fully pneumatized. The upper bill was described as 'ivory/dark pink patches, small grey patches', and the claws as 'ivory'. The iris as 'red (blood?)'.

I have observed other unusually coloured Magpies in recent months. On 4 April 1992 an adult bird at Kyogle was seen to have a large white patch in the centre of its otherwise black back. On 2 July 1992 an adult Magpie foraging with other birds on the roadway at New Street, South Grafton was observed to have the left half of its nape black instead of white. The margin between the black and white halves appeared to be irregular or jagged.

On 2 October 1992 a Magpie observed north-west of *Cooma* Homestead, west of Moree, had the centre of the black back coloured white, similar to the Kyogle bird described above. An adult female Magpie observed at Iluka on 26 March 1993 had part of its normally white nape patch coloured black — see Figure 1. On 1 July 1993 two adult Magpies observed foraging on the roadside at Coutts Crossing, one with a grey-white back and the other normally coloured.

## DISCUSSION

These are my first records of abnormally coloured Magpies. The Blaxland Flat bird had extensive areas of its plumage and soft parts abnormally coloured, but all of the other birds appeared to have normal plumage colours other than on the areas described above, and normal soft part colouration.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Sven Christiansen for drawing my attention to the unusual Magpie at Blaxland Flat and for delivering the specimen to me after its death, and Walter Boles of the Australian Museum for providing details of the specimen.

## SPARROWS WITH MAN-MADE NESTING MATERIAL

**TOM L. KELSEY**

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On the mornings of 16, 17 and 18 October 1992 at Rozelle, a Sydney suburb, I looked downward from my window onto an adjacent rooftop about 15 m away and between 07.30 and 08.30 hours watched three pairs of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* working across the roof in what appeared to be a well-organised flock. UV light had broken down the surface bonding of the corrugated sheet roof exposing the underlying glass fibres and the birds were collecting nest material by tearing up small clumps of white fibre. Although the males were obviously involved in the proceedings the females were doing most of the collecting.

Previously, before adding an extension to my house there had been a stringybark tree in the garden and Sparrows were regularly seen tugging at the bark and carrying away strands for the same purpose.



## BOOK REVIEW

Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume I Ratites to Ducks (1990), Volume II Raptors to Lapwings (1993), co-ordinated by S. Marchant & P. J. Higgins, printed by Impact Printing Melbourne and published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the RAOU. Vol. I was published in two parts with 1400 pp. and 96 coloured plates, and Vol. II with 980 pp. and 68 coloured plates. Numerous maps, b & w drawings and tables. Vol I cost \$285 (in 1991) and Vol. II \$270 (1993), available from RAOU Melbourne.

The Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds (HANZAB) represents a tremendous undertaking by the RAOU and is proving to be the most exciting and significant project in Australian ornithology today. HANZAB will be produced in six volumes and provides a comprehensive and accurate synthesis of our knowledge of all birds that occur in the Region. HANZAB has become the standard work of reference for the Region because it has gathered together all the ornithological information available pertaining to Australasian birds. As well as Australia, New Zealand and Antarctica the area covered by the books includes Cocos-Keeling, Christmas, Lord Howe, Norfolk, Kermadec, Chatham and sub-antarctic Islands and islands and reefs of the Coral Sea.

Within this Region about 900 species of birds have been recorded. Species accounts have been divided into sections: Field Identification, Habitat, Distribution and Population, Movements, Food, Social Organisation, Social Behaviour, Voice, Breeding and Plumage and related matters. Volume I covers 196 species of which 162 breed in the Region, Volume II 118 species with 92 breeding. With over 200 contributors from Australia, New Zealand and overseas and an editorial team to prepare, compile and edit the accounts and illustrations for each species the production has been a marathon effort.

In reviewing the two volumes I have paid particular attention to what FOC members might find of interest. Such things as details of NSW distribution and breeding data, use of English names, accuracy of the illustrations and the quality of the information overall will be considered.

Overall, the NSW distribution data provided for each species are excellent and I have found little to criticise. Extensive use has been made of information published in the FOC annual bird reports and in articles published in *Australian Birds*. Occasionally an author has only utilised the data from the Nest Record Scheme when providing information on colonial nesting sites in NSW when our annual reports have a much more extensive coverage and provide a more comprehensive picture, but such situations are rare. The maps are excellent. Often, as well as a map for distribution in Australia or New Zealand, a separate map is provided for the whole Region. A darker tone is used to indicate areas

where the species is more abundant; sometimes such differentiation is not consistent with known NSW abundance and distribution (e.g. the Lewins Rail map understates the distribution although the text is correct) but overall the maps are accurate.

Generally the taxonomy follows the RAOU Checklist of 1978 and presumably conforms to the new Checklist being prepared by the RAOU Taxonomic Advisory Committee (TAC) and due to be published later this year. Members will have no difficulty in finding their way through the systematic list in HANZAB; the biggest change comes in the Ardeidae (egrets, herons, ibis, etc.) where all the genera formerly separated as *Ardea*, *Butoroides*, *Egretta* have been lumped as *Ardea*. This means that the Great Egret, Little Egret and Mangrove Heron are now *Ardea alba*, *A. garzetta* and *A. striata*. Rumour has it that the TAC is likely to separate these species again in the new list! The other major change to nomenclature is in the Charadriidae (plovers and lapwings). The Hooded Plover has been placed in the genus *Thinornis* with the Shore Plover from the Chatham Islands due to similarities in behaviour and morphology; the Black-fronted Plover in the monotypic genus *Elseyornis* because of its separate allozymes; the Inland Dotterel has been found to be a true plover, based on its allozymes, and so returns to *Charadrius*; and the Red-kneed Dotterel has been placed with the lapwings on the grounds of its retained hind-toe, wing pattern and allozymes. None of these changes required an alteration to the Recommended English Names, but to be consistent Inland Dotterel should now become Inland Plover.

The illustrations, depicting every bird known to have occurred in the Region since 1900, are very competently painted by J. N. Davies. Every colour and immature and juvenile plumage phase is illustrated as are ducklings and wader chicks. I have found no fault with the illustrations. In the first volume there are 90 colour plates and the second volume has 68. In addition, sonograms and half-tone illustrations of behavioural postures for each species are provided.

In summary, the RAOU has had a notable achievement with HANZAB. Stephen Marchant and Peter Higgins have competently led and inspired an expert team of editors, compilers and contributors to produce a world class standard, indeed leader, of ornithological scholarship. Everything that is known about each species covered in the two volumes can be found in these books. They are the ultimate source of reference for the birds of this region. Congratulations, RAOU, on a job well done! The two volumes were well worth spending one's tax cheque on, so start saving now for Volume III (due in 1995).

*Alan Morris*

## Advice to contributors

Manuscripts should be typed with double spacing and wide margins at top and sides, and submitted initially as an original and two duplicates. Tables and figures must be in the form of reproducible hard copy, having due regard to the journal page size and format. If extensive re-typing or drafting is required publication may be delayed or prevented. Photographs should be submitted as glossy black and white prints of size and contrast suitable for reproduction.

Upon acceptance, it is most helpful if the final manuscripts of substantial articles can be submitted in word processor format. The editor will advise details of acceptable formats.

Contributions are considered on the understanding that they are not being offered for publication elsewhere.

Authors are advised to consult a current issue of *Australian Birds* as a guide to style and punctuation, which conform in general to the *Commonwealth Style Manual*. Spelling follows the *Macquarie Dictionary*. In particular:

**dates** are written '1 January 1990', but may be abbreviated in tables and figures;

the **24 hour clock** is used with Eastern Standard Time, e.g. 06 30 for 6.30 am and 18 30 for 6.30 pm. Daylight Saving time should be corrected to EST;

in the text, single-digit numbers are spelt out; 10 000 and larger numbers are printed with a space (not a comma) separating the thousands;

**English names** of bird species (but not group names) are written with an initial capital for each separate word.

**References to books** appear in the form

Marchant, S. & Higgins, P.J. (eds) 1990, *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, Vol. 1, OUP, Melbourne.

and to **journals** as

Morris, A.K., Tyler, V., Tyler, M., Mannes, H. & Dalby, J. 1990, 'A Waterbird survey of the Parramatta River wetlands, Sydney', *Aust Birds*, 23:3, pp. 44-64.

These are cited in the text as Marchant & Higgins (1990) or (Morris et al. 1990), respectively.



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