

"To encourage the observation and study of the birds of the Toowoomba area."

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NEWS-SHEET No. 44 - AUGUST, 1979.

The editorial to News-sheet No. 37 (January 1979) carried a reference to a number of birds which have been seen in the Club area but which have not been confirmed to the list. Of this few birds the Red-capped Robin has now been admitted. Some of the others are still seen but not yet by two members, which is the requisite for admission to the Club list. The group now includes Brolga and Scarlet Robin, which were reported more recently.

Prior to January, 1978 the Club's local study area did not extend as far Eastward as it now does. However records exist (documented through this News-sheet) of birds which were seen in places just beyond the boundary as it then existed and which are now well within the perimeter. The Executive is giving consideration to the inclusion of these birds on the Club list. This would only involve birds which had been confirmed by two members together and which had been reported in this journal. Further developments will be advised.

Members taking part in the last Field Day were given an opportunity to view a Grey Goshawk close up. Details of how this came about are given in the Field Day report elsewhere in this issue, but we mention it here so that we may record the Club's official "Thank You" to Dr. Graham Allen for making the bird available.

One of the Club's regular contributors of interesting articles, Rod Hobson, has recently returned from a visit to Niu Guini. This should set Rod's pen stirring so we are hopeful of putting to paper Rod's impressions of birding in that country.

Because of the success of recent camp-outs and enthusiasm shown by members participating we are planning the next for November. This would be the week-end 17/18th. and the venue will be Goomburra. There is a State Forest camping area available, with facilities. The area is scenically very attractive and the campsite is a very pleasant place to spend a week-end.

Birdwise you could hope for such species as Glossy Black-Cockatoo, and White-winged Chough. In view of recent discussion on possible similarity in the calls of Spotted Pardalote and Bell Miner this trip would enable direct comparison. So start checking over your duffle and join us in November.

Ron Hopkinson,  
Editor.

### "BARKING" UP THE WRONG TREE.

A plethora of stories exist regarding "damsels in distress" harrowing the Australian bush night with their dolorous screams. Aside to the few bona fide distressed damsels, and ignoring baryips, braying donkeys and Fisher-type ghosts, the blame has finally come to roost on the cryptic shoulders of an Australian Strigid owl. Exactly which owl, though, has been a debatable issue for a long time.

Original contender for the title was *Ninox strenua*, the Powerful Owl but the true culprit has now emerged as the Barking Owl, *Ninox connivens*, also variously known as the Northern Winking Owl, Western Winking Owl or just plain Winking Owl. Apropos of the dubious honour of scaring the pants off the occasional bushman, it has also been dubbed Screech Owl, Screaming Woman and Banshee Owl.

Over a time I have unearthed, both from written and verbal sources, various explanations regarding these peculiar calls. Originally, as stated above, the Powerful Owl was the prime suspect. Macdonald, referring to *strenua*'s call, states: "Voice: loud deep and slowly uttered 'woo-hoo' or 'woof-woof', also 'loud and rather terrifying scream ending in low moan'." Slater and Reader's Digest concur with the "woo-hoo, woof-woof" statement but make no mention of the "terrifying scream". All three authorities, however, agree that this peculiar call is a possession of the Barking Owl, along with a low growling and a "woop-woop", "wuk-wuk" or "wook-wook", depending no doubt on the fancy of the listener.

Fleay has induced a "screaming woman" call in captive Barking Owls by ringing a condamine bell, a type of cow bell, in their presence. Writing in his "Nature Notes - The Courier Mail", Tuesday, April 17, 1979, he states: "A final point to emphasise is that Barking Owls are the culprits responsible for the rarely used "screaming woman" cries that have startled many a wayfarer.

It is the hen owl with her soprano voice who really shines at this performance particularly when passing overhead on silent wings by night."

Just prior to the Toowoomba Bird Club's foundation (October 1975) the "Toowoomba Chronicle" carried a story regarding a woman's screams heard emanating from Redwood Park. Several theories were advanced, aside to the obvious; one of which placed the blame on the Powerful Owl, incorrectly so. This may have seemed valid in view of the fact that the Powerful Owl had been discovered in Redwood Park earlier that same year. To add the "weight of condemnation" to Barking Owls' shoulders (wing coverts?), Alan Graham discovered this bird in Redwood shortly after the above incident on 25.11.75. Fortunately, with corpus delicti outstanding, *N. connivens* appeared the perpetrator of this puzzle.

Another wideheld belief is that this call is the mating call of the Barking Owl. Whilst it may call thusly in mating season (breeding season July-October) the "screams", although never abundant are most often heard in Autumn and not peculiar to the mating season.

Considering the wide distribution of the Barking Owl - "in eastern, northern and south-western Australia. Also in New Guinea and northern Moluccas" - it is interesting to ponder the derivation of such place names as Banshee Mountain, in the Goomburra/Mt. Mistake area, and Screaming Woman Creek near Kingaroy. Could we really have a Barking Owl Creek or Winking Owl Mountain?

#### Footnote to a footnote.

In "Upon Certain Eggs and their Layers", News-sheet No. 39, I stated that all Hydrophids (sea-snakes) are ovoviviparous. So they are - except for the genus *Laticauda* which lays eggs on land. This fact, coupled with the fact that this genus is partly terrestrial and together with certain diagnostic features has given rise to the theory that these snakes are actually aberrant Elapids (venemous, front-fanged land snakes) and not true sea-snakes. So it depends on your school of thought regarding my statement on ovoviviparity. Me? I'm going for the "aberrant Elapid" one.



### References.

- Calaby J., Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds, Reader's Digest, Sydney, 1976.
- Cogger H.G., Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia, Revised Edition, Reed, Sydney, 1979.
- Fleay D., Nature Notes, The Courier Mail, 17.4.79.
- Macdonald J.D., Birds of Australia, Reed, Sydney, 1979.
- Slater P.J., A Field Guide to Australian Birds, Non-passerines, Rigby, Adelaide, 1970.
- Vernon D., Queensland Museum, personal communication.

### THE WORLD OF ADVERTISING.

Two quotes tell this story --- First from "Birds of Prey" (Michael Everett).

"The magnificent California Condor has achieved fame as one of the world's rarest birds, now surviving only in its stronghold in the southern coastal mountains of California, where perhaps 50 are still living, and possibly in small numbers in the remote mountains of Baja California."

Second quote: from "Bless this Howson", TV Week, August 4th 1979.

"A condor was required to fly across the Grand Canyon for a particularly awe-inspiring shot of grandeur, beauty, majesty, power and greatness that would sell toilet paper or some such item.

The condor, a rare species, was searched for, found, captured, caged and taken to this wind swept plateau high above the Grand Canyon. There, director and crew waited. Four cameras were set up so no shot of this great bird sweeping with awesome power over the Canyon would be missed.

The sun rose to the right level, the clouds cleared to reveal an azure sky, the stones of the canyon reflected all the colours of the spectrum. This was the moment.

"Release the condor" cried the director. The cage was opened, the condor was released and plummeted thousands of feet into the chasm below.

Somebody had forgotten to tell somebody that its wings had been clipped to prevent it escaping."

Ron Hopkinson.

### A FEW PASSING BIRD NOTES.

I was fascinated to read the article "An Exaltation of Larks" in the July News-sheet. What a wealth of wonderfully descriptive terms for groups of birds and animals and how sad that so many have passed out of common usage! Some I am familiar with since childhood in England but most I have never heard before. My mother talked of parliaments of rooks and here in Australia I have come across parliaments of currawongs - seemingly also most appropriate. A charm of finches was a charm of goldfinches.

One term I would question is that referring to martens. Surely a richness of martens does not apply to the delightful little birds, (spelt martin), we know both here and in England but rather to the fierce little animal, the pine-marten, once common there and now confined to the wilder and most remote parts of Gt. Britain and which has a coat of rich fur akin to that of its relations the ermine, stoat and weasel etc.

In recent weeks Shorelands has had the not-so-welcome attentions of a small party of currawongs - who though superb to look at are rather out of scale in a small garden. Maybe their visits were first attracted by our fruit trees but now they do their best to raid the small bird table, still well patronised by blue-faced honeyeaters and butcherbirds, though noticeably so after rain! (Why?) The bird table, luckily, has a low roof which they find very frustrating, trying rare balancing acts in their efforts to stay long enough to collect a beakful. What interested me particularly was to find around this area a number of pellets, about 1½" long by ½" in diameter and to see one actually being disgorged by one of the raiders. They appear to mainly consist of fruit and seeds but nowhere can I find any mention of currawongs having this owl-like habit of disgorging the refuse and I would much like to know if this is customary.

Ann Shore.

### DEATH OF A DABCHICK.

Subsequent research since the article under this heading in the June News-sheet has found a mention of Pelican diet in "The Handbook of Australian Sea-birds" (Serventy-Serventy-Warham). Jane Corbin points out that page 183 lists Pelican food as "predominantly fish of various sizes. Also prawns, freshwater crayfish, tadpoles -- and even ducklings have been recorded."

Ron Hopkinson.

### RAPTOR GROUP.

At a recent symposium on birds of prey hosted by the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union a raptor group was formed. The broad aim of the group will be to promote raptor research in Australasia. Specific objectives are still being considered by the elected committee and members.

It is proposed that the group operate as a semi-autonomous association under the patronage of the Field Investigation Committee of the R.A.O.U. Membership will be open to all, whether members of the R.A.O.U. or not. Payment of a small annual subscription will be required to cover a newsletter and administration costs.

Those people who are interested in joining the raptor group and would like further information are invited to write to: David Baker-Gabb, Zoology Dept., Monash University, Clayton, 3168, Victoria.

Ron Hopkinson.

### SORTING THEM OUT - SOME PARTICULAR BIRDS OF PREY.

Members' Bird Notes and occasional items in our News-sheet over the last few years will attest to spasmodic sightings in our local study area of two particular birds of prey which have thus far refused to appear before more than one member at a time and which have accordingly not been added to the club's Toowoomba List.

There is another interesting characteristic which links these two birds of prey, for each of them is one of a 'pair' with a counterpart species from which it is not easily distinguishable, but which is more commonly seen and which is indeed represented on our local checklist.

The elusive two to which I refer are the Collared Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter cirrocephalus*) and the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), their look-alike partners being respectively the Australian Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*) and the Australasian Hobby (*Falco longipennis*).

As I have already indicated, the Collared Sparrowhawk has been recorded in our area on a number of occasions, appearing with increasing regularity of late in the Mackenzie Street/Middle Ridge area, while members will perhaps recall the well documented saga earlier this year, when we added bird after bird to our club records whilst in pursuit of the Peregrine which we all know is here, but which none of us ever saw except while totally alone.

In anticipation of an opportunity for early confirmation of one or both of these fast-moving raptors in our area it might be of value to members who are 'on the look-out' to attempt to clarify here those few field characteristics which can allow separation of falcon from falcon and hawk from hawk.

#### Peregrine Falcon or Australasian Hobby?

There are some reliable differences between these two species, by which I mean it is generally held that there are plumage differences which can be reasonably distinguished in the field. But first, there is the size differential. While the Hobby is much the size of an Australian Kestrel, the Peregrine is a considerably larger bird. It should be remembered that, as is usual with birds of prey, the female of each of the two species is bigger than the male, as a result of which it is possible that male Peregrines and female Hobbys could overlap in size, but the female Peregrine is

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SORTING THEM OUT (Cont/d.)

as big as a Grey Goshawk while the male Hobby is down around Kestrel size.

Whereas both of these birds share the same overall plumage, including slate grey head, black crown and face and rufous-streaked underparts, the Australasian Hobby does not display the bold black barring of the belly and underwing which is to be found on the Peregrine Falcon.

Incidentally, the Hobby has been recorded in all sectors of our local area, from Myer's rooftop outwards, not that that will help any in terms of identification for the cliff-haunting Peregrine is also well known as a city bird where there are high buildings to haunt and pigeons to be had.

Collared Sparrowhawk or Australian Goshawk?

Size is again to the fore, but this time the smaller bird is the one we are still to confirm. The male Sparrowhawk is perhaps a little larger than the male Hobby, while the female at least approaches in size, if not overlapping with, the virtually indistinguishable male Australian Goshawk.

As before then we can use size as a reliable pointer to identification only when confronted by the small male Collared Sparrowhawk or the very large female Australian Goshawk.

In terms of colouration, it is generally felt that the two birds may not be distinguished one from the other in the field. But all is not quite lost.

There is one other characteristic which can assist us to identify the culprit when he is raiding our chickens. The Collared Sparrowhawk displays a square tail when in flight as compared with the rounded tail of the Australian Goshawk.

On balance it is recognised that there are some differences in the favoured habitats of the two birds, with the Sparrowhawk the more likely of the two birds to be found along a creek in Redwood, but this matter of preferences can hardly be considered an aid to identification when a bird is flying overhead in the middle of a paddock.

Well, there it is. Looking back it does seem rather scant, but that only serves to reflect the difficulties which do exist when one is trying to carefully and objectively record whether or not a species is present in a locality. Familiarity with the Australian Goshawk is perhaps a prerequisite to identification of a Collared Sparrowhawk, but if not, it is certainly going to be a considerable advantage.

Eileen Jolly.

References.

- CONDON H.T., Field Guide to the Hawks of Australia, The Bird Observers Club, Melbourne, 1970.  
FRITH H. (Cons. Ed.), Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds, Reader's Digest, Sydney, 1976.  
MACDONALD J.D., Birds of Australia, Reed, Sydney, 1973.  
SLATER P.J., A Field Guide to Australian Birds, Non-Passerines, Rigby, Adelaide, 1970.

FIELD DAY REPORT - 22.7.79. - JUBILEE PARK.

Sometimes when planning Field Days a particular bird comes to the fore as being the bird of the area which the planners hope will appear during the day. This was the case with the July trip to Jubilee Park and Prince Henry Drive. The Grey Goshawk was the bird we hoped would appear. We had not left the assembly point when the bird arrived ----- in the rear of Bill Jolly's station wagon.

The Graham Allen family of Brodie Street are endeavouring to raise poultry and have been losing stock to the depredations of a Grey Goshawk. Having a good approach to such matters they were in the process of roofing the run with wire netting, as distinct from the fellow I heard of recently who shot a bird of prey for taking a pigeon.

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FIELD DAY REPORT (Cont/d.)

The Allens had one small section to complete when the Grey Goshawk entered and took a chicken. In the process it ran foul (pun intended) of the wire and was captured and placed in a cage until the job could be completed. So Bill Jolly was able to "borrow" the bird and show the splendid specimen to members on the Field Day. Your writer was present at Brodie St. later in the day when the bird was released. It flew off quite well and perched in a tree to the consternation of the Pied Currawongs and Noisy Miners.

The party visiting Jubilee Park was a nice mixture of "old hands" and newer members. This was the first time the Club had made a Field trip to this park and although similar in many respects to Redwood Park it is a large area and deserves attention whenever we can fit it into the program. Unfortunately it is also receiving the attentions of trail bike riders whose tracks are quite evident. As mentioned in the Editorial to this issue we turned them out. Doubtless they will do a MacArthur. All round, another pleasant birding day spent in the company of old and new friends.

Ron Hopkinson.

Species List - Jubilee Park - 22.7.79.

Straw-necked Ibis	Varied Sittella
Rainbow Lorikeet	White-throated Treecreeper
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	Noisy Miner
Australian King Parrot	Lewin's Honeyeater
Crimson Rosella	Eastern Spinebill
Pale-headed Rosella	Mistletoebird
Laughing Kookaburra	Spotted Pardalote
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Striated Pardalote
Rose Robin	Silvereye
Crested Shrike-tit	Red-browed Firetail
Golden Whistler	Olive-backed Oriole
Grey Fantail	Grey Butcherbird
Eastern Whipbird	Pied Butcherbird
Superb Fairy-wren	Australian Magpie
Variegated Fairy-wren	Pied Currawong
Brown Thornbill	Australian Raven
Striated Thornbill	Torresian Crow.



"I got life for being an endangered species."



MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

Hardhead. 20.6.79. "Ringmere", Withcott. WJ. EJ.

Grey Goshawk. 2.6.79. Mackenzie Street. EJ.

Wedge-tailed Eagle.(3). 16.7.79. Rangeview. JEC.

Spotted Harrier. 1.8.79. Charlton. DN.

Australian Brush-Turkey. 28.7.79. Rangeview. JEC.

Rose Robin. 1.7.79. Mango Vale, Withcott. AHS.

Eastern Spinebill. 1.7.79. Ocean Street. GC. JCC.

GC: Graham Corbin. JCC: Jane Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. EJ: Eileen Jolly.

WJ: Bill Jolly. DN: David Newlands. AHS: Ann Shore.

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FIELD DAY FOR AUGUST.

Date: Sunday, August 26th. 1979.

Place: Helidon, Grantham, Gatton  
(water bird areas.)

Leader: Bill Jolly.

Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.

Time: 8.15 a.m. -- departure 8.30 a.m. sharp.

NEW MEMBERS.

The Club is pleased to welcome the following new members:

Michael & Simon Atzeni, 2, Memory Street, Toowoomba.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

The Bird Observer - July 1979.

Ecos (CSIRO environmental magazine) - May, 1979.

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