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

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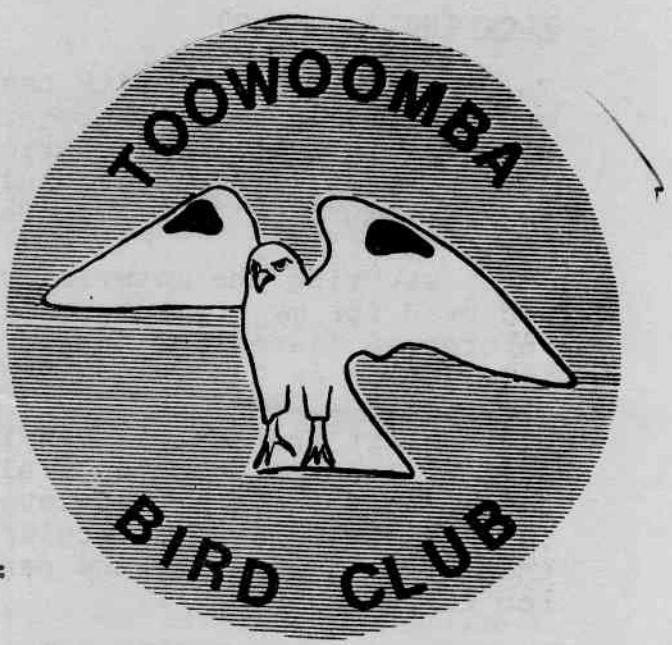

NEWS-SHEET No. 52 - APRIL, 1980.

I had expected that the topic for this editorial - the meeting held at Ravensbourne - would fill a couple of pages. However this is not to be the case. Few members turned up on the day and no momentous decisions were made. Although the numbers were discouraging, the sentiments expressed were not. It appears that we will continue to operate on the same basis that we have in the past.

Our major concern at the moment is operational costs - a problem caused partly by failure of some members to pay their subscription. Meanwhile, we of the executive are investigating ways of reducing the cost of producing the monthly News-Sheet.

One point of interest is a meeting which Ron and I had with the local representative of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. There will be more on this topic at a later date after further meetings.

The two copies of the Readers Digest "Complete Book of Australian Birds" are still available at $22.69 each.

J. Gregor,
Editor.

Ref: News Sheet No. 34 - October 1978. Toowoomba Bird Club.

Re: "The Australian Magpie-lark" (Grallina cyanoleuca)

FLOCKING

The query in regard to "flocking" of Australian Magpie-larks in News Sheet No. 34 - October 1978, has prompted, in my case, an interesting exercise in endeavouring to understand the reason for such and as well, to appreciate some of the more pertinent points associated with the life of the Australian Magpie-lark.

(cont/d.)

FLOCKING (cont/d.)

To this point, difficulty has been experienced in finding material of a specific nature in regard to "flocking" of the Australian Magpie-lark with the exception of the work carried out by Robinson 1947, in Western Australia, the result of which appears in "The Emu", vol. 46+47, "Magpie Larks - a study in behaviour".

After studying the material referred to above, to which I am indebted for my present understanding of the subject and the references listed at the end of the exercise, a short note on the information as I presently understand it, follows.

Having left the nest at varying stages usually between 14 and 21 days of age the young Australian Magpie-larks spend their next period well above ground level, preferably high in a tree until their feathers and particularly their tails grow. At this time they are still fed by the parents and they practice and prepare for flight.

Following this the young birds come to the ground staying close to the parents whilst these search for food and continue to be fed by the parent birds but are all the while gradually learning to fend for themselves and becoming independent of the parents.

Depending on conditions and availability of food with the independence of the young birds the parent Australian Magpie-larks nest again and raise another brood.

During this time, young birds which have separated from their parents in one territory gradually congregate with young birds from other territories and all move about and roost together at a flock roosting site. With the waning of the breeding season and a lack of interest in defending a territory by paired birds, smaller flocks may converge together into a large flock which may also include paired birds from the past season.

Should the weather be very dry in an area, after the breeding season, the flock may move to where more abundant supplies of water are available, the move usually being accomplished in smaller groups of birds.

Whilst flocks comprise birds of both sexes, it appears that unmated birds in a flock generally feed with others of the same sex, until the next mating season occurs and it is generally considered that unless already "paired", birds mate whilst members of a flock. It is thought that birds already "paired" have mated for life.

Pairs of birds "mating" within a flock appear to do so at varying times and not all at once and choosing a mate is not left exclusively to males or females, but either one choosing its appropriate opposite.

Favourable weather conditions and in particular good rain at the start of the breeding season appears to be an indication for mated pairs from existing territories or newly mated pairs in the flock, to leave the flock and get on with the cycle of nest building, egg laying, brooding and rearing of young.

(cont/d.)

FLOCKING (cont/d.)

It is thought, possibly after their second season, that some mated pairs of birds in established territories don't join the flock but stay in their own territories after the breeding season favouring the nesting tree as a roosting tree and depending on whether there is sufficient food to eat and a suitable supply of surface water.

The average territory appears to cover about 6 to 8 hectares but parts of contiguous territories may overlap.

In an 'old' flock of large proportions, newer mated pairs of birds have to go to the extremities to establish territories and in their case quite a deal of overlapping may occur, but the amount of food available appears to govern to some extent the size of territories.

Where conditions of food and water have been favourable outside of the breeding season and the flock has remained on the ground of the former breeding territories, mated pairs of birds in the new breeding season find most of their time taken up defending their territories against flock trespassers, if they have established their territory near the flock roosting site of unmated birds and it is easily realised that the further a territory is established from the flock roosting area the better the chances of completing the breeding cycle and raising young.

It seems that the female of the pair defends the territory from other females and calls up her mate to defend the area from intruding males, but for his part this is frequently a lethargic affair with the male showing little enthusiasm for aggressiveness, particularly when compared with the female.

In summarising, as an observation in regard to Australian Magpie-larks only, in this case "flocking" appears as though it may be a means whereby communal movement takes place to better food and water areas where such does not exist for so many individuals on a nesting territory outside of the breeding season; to take care of the pairing and mating process and have this already established by the time territory "staking" takes place, as opposed to a male first becoming established in an area and waiting for a female bird to arrive on that area.

Flocking, generally, appears to involve unmated birds and mated pairs in their first season and appears of diminishing interest to mated pairs of birds from their second season onward.

Ron Wilson.

Acknowledgement.

I wish to thank John Gregor for his interest and assistance with some of the reference material which was not readily available.

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(cont/d.)

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Ron Wilson.

FOOD FOR A CICADABIRD

When driving quietly up the hillside at Mangovale, Withcott, one morning in early February, my attention was attracted by a single, repeated, call close at hand in the scrub.

It came from a very smart looking Cicadabird, hopping about among the low branches and rocks. I noticed that it was making attack after attack on something apparently caught up in a lantana bush. This remained in one place but every so often there was a flash of bright puce pink. I moved closer, expecting to find a battered looking moth perhaps, only the colour looked wrong, and instead found a large green insect, some 60-75 mm long, something of a cross between a grasshopper and a stick insect, with big collapsible puce wings which when at rest were neatly folded away under an ordinary looking green sheath. Why it was hanging there, alternatively opening and closing its large and vivid wings and seemingly taking no notice of the Cicadabird's attacks, I could not tell, unless perhaps it was newly emerged from its chrysalis stage and intent on hardening and drying its wings. The Cicadabird's attacks appeard to have had no visible effects, beyond the possible removal of one leg but when I returned down that path 15 minutes or so later both bird and insect had gone.

Ann Shore.

BIRDING ON THE HOLIDAY ISLE.

I recall once reading where Bluey and Curly (of the comic strip of that name) were talking to a swagman acquaintance of travels in Tasmania. He claimed that Tasmania was the best state for travel, because when he got tired of walking around it, he could jump in and swim around it.

While this is not quite true, it is indicative of the ease and rapidity with which one can get to any point on the island. Because of this, one can experience a great variety of bird habitats (and thus bird species) in quite a short period.

Shirley and I spent a fortnight travelling around Tasmania in a campervan during December, and in this time we managed to visit most points of interest. While travelling we kept an eye open for any birds along the way and at most campsites we spent some time birdwatching.

The heavily timbered National Parks were the most productive areas with sightings of species endemic to Tasmania such as the Green Rosella, Yellow Wattlebird and Black Currawong.

Probably the next most productive environment was the seashore, with many species represented in strength. Of these I found the Pacific Gull particularly impressive, since I am used to seeing only the smaller Silver Gull. This bird seems to have mastered a somewhat unnerving glare. A hitch-hiker we picked up told us (on learning of our interest in birds) of a site near Bicheno where Penguins (species unknown) appeared each morning in "hundreds". However, by then the site was miles (or rather kilometres) behind so we'll probably never know the truth of the matter.

One interesting point is that we had occasional sightings of Grey Butcherbirds. The only reference we were carrying at the time was Slater's Field Guide to Australian Birds which lists this species as not occurring in Tasmania.

Although we identified a total of thirty-nine different species while in Tasmania, by far the most common was the Masked Lapwing.

If you enjoy doing a bit of birdwatching during your holidays, we can certainly recommend the "Holiday Isle".

John Gregor.

FIELD DAY REPORT - 23.3.80. - RAVENSBOURNE NATIONAL PARK.

Because of earlier timing, our visit to Ravensbourne avoided the strong, cold winds which have been our lot on past visits. Fine, clear, early autumn weather made for ideal conditions this trip. A small party arrived at the turn-off to the park and were granted an excellent view of two wedge-tailed eagles at low level.

Some interesting sightings were made during the day including the Yellow-throated Scrubwren, Noisy Pitta and Australian Ground Thursh. A good days birding, unfortunately shared by so few.

Ron Hopkinson.

Species List - Ravensbourne National Park - 23.3.80.

Wedge-tailed Eagle	Grey Shrike Thrush
Australian Kestrel	Grey Fantail
Australian Brush-turkey	Willie Wagtail
Masked Lapwing	Eastern Whipbird
Brown Cuckoo-dove	Sup. Fairy wren
Wonga Pigeon	Large-billed Scrubwren
Galah	Yellow-throated Scrubwren
Rainbow Lorikeet	Wh.-Browed Scrubwren
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	Brown Warbler
Australian King Parrot	Brown Thornbill
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Lewin's Honeyeater
Laughing Kookaburra	Red-Browed Firetail
Noisy Pitta	Australian Magpie-lark
White-backed Swallow	Grey Butcherbird
Australian Ground Thrush	Australian Magpie
Eastern Yellow Robin	Pied Currawong
Golden Whistler	Torresian Crow

MEMBERS' BIRD NOTES.

(70) Great Cormorant. 15.3.80. Ocean St. JEC.
Brown Goshawk. 15.3.80. Jubilee Pk. SB. MA. AT.
Fan-tailed Cuckoo. 14.3.80. Redwood Pk. MW. BW.
Australian Owlet-nightjar. 10.3.80. Echo Valley. MA
Rainbow Bee-eater. 2.3.80. Ocean St. GC. JEC. JCC.
Cicadabird. 15.3.80. Jubilee Pk. SB. MA. AT.
Varied Triller. 14.3.80. Redwood Pk. MW. BW.
Golden Whistler. 14.3.80. Redwood Pk. MW. BW.
Brown-headed Honeyeater. 20.3.80. Echo Valley. MA.

MA: Michael Atzeni. SB: Shane Bradey. GC: Graham Corbin.
JCC: Jane Corbin. JEC: Jim Corbin. AT: Andrew Tan.
BW: Brough Warren. MW: Margaret Warren.

FIELD DAY FOR APRIL.

Date: Sunday, April, 27th, 1980. Place: Murphys Creek.

Assembly Point: Pigotts Car Park.

Time: 8.15 am for departure 8.30 sharp.

The outing will follow the Murphys Creek Road, stopping at places of interest such as Spring Bluff.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.
QOS Newsletter - March, 1980.

URIMBIRRA - March, 1980.