

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

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NEWS-SHEET No. 57-SEPTEMBER, 1980.

The Annual General Meeting will take place on Saturday, October 18th. commencing at 7.30pm. Venue will be the residence of John and Shirley Gregor at 2 Loch St. Toowoomba.

The business side should occupy about one hour, following which it is hoped to have a guest speaker and perhaps a film. A light supper will be served for which the ladies are asked to bring a plate.

The agenda for the meeting appears elsewhere in this issue. Also the opportunity will be taken to finalise arrangements for the Annual Bird Census. Nominations for office must be handed to the Secretary prior to the meeting. A suitable nomination form is printed in this issue together with the agenda.

October is always an important and busy month on our Club calendar in that the Annual General Meeting and Annual Bird Census take place. The Club has now conducted four counts and is approaching the stage when valid comparisons can be made. However on present indications there is doubt in my mind if this year's census will take place. This statement is prompted by the deafening silence which resulted from my appeal for offers of help in last month's issue of this News-sheet.

Granted, we have a number of members living outside the area who geography may prevent from taking part (although, in fact, the only reply received was from a member presently in Bouliia).

Overall, membership numbers have declined a little. But it would appear that the interest of the remaining members has also declined. This is indeed unfortunate---so I make one more appeal for volunteers (to count, or tick, or drive) to assist with the census. In fairness to the Executive, let any one of them know if YOU are interested in the birds of Toowoomba. The day set aside for the count is Sunday, October 26th.

Ron Hopkinson,  
Acting Editor.

REWARD FOR INFORMATION RECEIVED.

Keen-eyed birdwatchers east of Toowoomba could be in the running for a \$1500 reward.

This statement is made in an article in the Sunday Mail newspaper dated August 31st. Victorian photographer Jack Cupper will pay this reward to the first person who can show him the nesting place of a Red Goshawk (*Erythrotriorchis radiatus*).

"Records show that about 40 years ago the species nested in some very rugged country east of Toowoomba" Jack said. The reward is for anyone who finds a nest before he does and for exclusive photos of the nest.

But before you make plans to spend the money, the book "Birds of Prey of the World" (Grossman and Hamlet) refers to the species as "one of the least common birds of prey"--"rare and extremely shy species".

Ann Shore- Ron Hopkinson

MIMICRY OF THE COMMON STARLING.

In answer to Shane Brady's request for information on this subject it is very common in England and I seem to remember that hand-reared starlings have been able to mimic a range of non-bird forms, including the human voice and on one occasion an attempt was made to imitate the yapping of a puppy owned by the people who were raising the young bird. Also, because of its bigger numbers the roosting habits make it unpopular.

When I was living in Norfolk there was a lot of comment at one time because a flock of Starlings had completely killed off a fine stand of Beech trees covering some five acres. They roosted there in such numbers that the trees and ground were completely covered with accumulated droppings-- in such quantity that the soil was affected

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and the trees died. I think that accumulated acidity had a lot to do with it. Movie film taken as the birds were frightened off their perches gave counts of around 50,000 birds. Quite a problem.

Ron Colpus.

#### PIED CURRAWONG PELLETS.

With reference to Ann shore's note regarding the regurgitation of pellets (News-sheet No. 44, August 1979). Many birds (of prey, particularly) disgorge pellets consisting of undigested remains of a meal.

So much about birds is an adaptation to flight. They have dispensed with the weight of teeth and jaws and have developed horny mandibles to manipulate food and pass it direct into the digestive system without the need for chewing. Young birds are not berated for gulping their food as we were.

Gulping has the advantage that the bird is occupied for a minimum amount of time in a potentially dangerous situation--being on or near the ground, preoccupied with eating.

The disadvantage is that the food must be passed whole, or nearly so, into the storage section of the digestive system, the crop. From here it moves into the two section stomach, consisting of the proventriculus and the gizzard. The proventriculus is concerned with the chemical breakdown of food and it is here that the food is mixed with enzymes. In the gizzard the rough work of mastication takes place. This is achieved by means of muscular contraction and relaxation (called peristalsis). Quite a number of birds swallow grit to assist with the breaking up of food particles.

However, the food still contains all the indigestible elements, seeds, bones, feathers, fur etc and for this material to proceed further into the digestive system would add needless weight to the bird and give the remaining sections of the system fruitless labour. So these portions of the meal are formed into a tight bolus or pellet and by means of reverse peristalsis (like vomiting) are ejected through the mouth.

Like flight patterns, digestive systems vary with different birds and different modes of existence. Shrikes, butcherbirds and magpies have been recorded as ejecting pellets. Identification of the contents of pellets gives valuable information as to the diet of the species.

References: Birds for Beginners. J.D. MacDonald. Reed.

How Birds Live. Robert Burton. Elsevier Phaidon.

Ron Hopkinson.

#### CAMP-OUT AT LESLIE DAM.

A few months ago myself and Club member Andrew Tan were on a 4 day school camp at Leslie Dam. We two, being the only birdlovers in the 7th Grade, had a lot of country to cover. We enjoyed many first sightings.

Some highlights of the camp were the Pelicans flying magnificently in the early mornings and Apostlebirds feeding outside our huts. We were entertained by a Red-necked Stint and white-winged Trillers were common, at the creek there.

I observed a total of 50 species of which a few are: White-winged Triller, Eastern Rosella, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Red-necked Stint, Black-tailed Native Hen, Whistling Kite and Tawny Frogmouth.

Shane Brady.

LATHAM'S SNIPE (Gallinago hardwickii).

The Latham's Snipe is one of the forty-odd trans-equatorial migrants which visit Australia annually.

It breeds in Japan (and is commonly known as the Japanese Snipe) during the summer of the northern hemisphere and then migrates southward to escape the northern winter. This means that it arrives in Australia during our spring, the first birds arriving at Cape York at about mid-August. For the most they do not stay in Queensland, but continue southward, the majority of the birds spending the summer in southeastern New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. There they stay until autumn, most birds having departed for their breeding grounds in Japan by the end of March.

A physical description of the Latham's snipe taken from the Readers Digest "Complete Book of Australian Birds" is as follows:

"Length- 230-250mm including 75mm bill.

Adults- sexes similar. Upper parts light brown streaked with black. 16-18 tail feathers.

Primaries dark brown. Throat light brown; upper breast light brown flecked with black; lower breast and belly pale grey; flanks and undertail pale grey streaked with black; bill olive-brown; legs and feet olive-grey. Immatures similar to adults."

These birds are usually found in thick grass and undergrowth along the edges of swamps, meadows and streams. This choice of habitat together with the bird's mottled appearance mean that it is often not seen until flushed from underfoot--which has certainly been the case in my experience of the species. However, from an article which appeared in "Australian Outdoors and Fishing" it seems that it is not unknown for the bird to also perch in trees.

Upon being flushed, the Latham's Snipe flies rapidly in a zig-zag pattern called jinking which is characteristic of the species. It then drops to the ground or flies in an arc to land elsewhere. It is this fast erratic flight which makes it popular as a game bird--it poses something of a challenge to hit.

Unfortunately for the Latham's Snipe, it can - legally- be shot at for virtually the whole of its stay in Australia. Open seasons in Queensland coincide with its passage through this state-- both southwards and northwards, while those of Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia coincide with its period of residence in the south-east. Only in New South Wales is it immune from the hunter's gun.

To quote from "Aspects of the Biology of the Japanese Snipe Gallinago hardwickii" by H.J.Frith, F.H.J.Crome and B.A.Brown

"Snipe hunting is a specialized sport and many of the hunters have considerable experience and skill. Their rate of success is high in relation to the number of birds flushed and they must be considered a potent factor in the bird's mortality in Australia. These points do not necessarily indicate that a well managed population of Gallinago hardwickii could not continue to support a hunting season. However they do indicate that before the population can be called "well-managed" in Australia there is a need for research on the factors controlling population, a review of hunting regulations, and a positive programme of habitat preservation."

So the next time you see a Latham's Snipe, remember that unless something positive is done to conserve this species, it may eventually join the list of rare Australian birds.

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LATHAM'S SNIPE c't'd.

References: The Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds.  
"Aspects of the Biology of the Japanese Snipe Gallinago hardwickii  
by H.J.Frith, F.H.J.Crome, B.K.Brown, CSIRO, Division of Wildlife  
Research, as reported in the Australian Journal of Ecology (1977).  
"Snipe are Where You Find 'Em " by Tom Gannon, Australian Outdoors  
and Fishing, February 1977.

John Gregor.

ODDITIES OF BIRD BEHAVIOUR.

The story of the misbehaviour of the famous Pelicans in St. James' Park in London (The Chronicle, Sat. August 9th.) who had the impudence to vary their usual diet of hand-fed mackerel by the addition of tasty ducklings and the perhaps not-so-tasty pigeon, much to the horror of passing tourists, prompts me to wonder whether this was only the erratic behaviour of zoo or park birds out of their normal environment and perhaps rather bored with their lazy existence, or whether Pelicans in the wild have been seen to take small birds like this on occasion as food.

Imagine the consternation if this became a habit in St. James' Park! This park set in central London is noted for its large waterfowl population of exotic and native species which nest and raise families of delectable Pelican-sized mouthfuls regularly each Spring amid the noise and bustle of hordes of visitors and locals who take their presence very much as a colourful and enlivening part of the London scene.

At the recent Iranian Embassy seige in London, commentators noted a Mallard Duck (the most common species in England) who continued to brood and successfully rear her young on a nest in a window box of the adjoining building. Indeed as travellers will probably know, it is no uncommon sight to see heavy London traffic being held up while such a bird and her trail of tiny ducklings is escorted to the safety of a nearby park from a similar and maybe more unlikely nesting site.

Ann Shore.

FIELD DAY REPORT- SOUTH WEST TOOWOOMBA- 24-8-80

This particular Club Field Day was, for me at any rate, somewhat abbreviated but nevertheless members saw some 40 different species in a comparatively short time.

Our first stop at the cemetery yielded none of the Robins that we had been told to look out for nor anything else of special interest, though a bird resembling a Spangled Drongo was seen several times but not positively identified.

Continuing westwards, near the junction of Alderley and Greenwattle streets we noted a few Straw-necked Ibis, Noisy Friarbirds busy in the gums and a flight of Cockatiels that flew in.

We found that the low scrub and grass had recently been burnt off along parts of Spring Creek, perhaps intended as a clearance, and while this meant no Fairy-wrens, there was lots of other bird life around so some of our party, myself included, decided to remain there while the others went on to the Westbrook area, chancing to find better hunting there.

A number of small birds were flitting about near the creek, among them Yellow-faced Honeyeaters being much in evidence, and further on a solitary Pacific Heron and a Little Pied Cormorant were busy near the water to the accompaniment of continuous plop-plopping of

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frogs while overhead streaked the vividly coloured Red-rumped Parrots and members of the Lorikeet family.

Ann Shore.

SPECIES LIST-24-8-80

Little Pied Cormorant  
Pacific Heron  
White-faced Heron  
Straw-necked Ibis  
Australian Kestrel  
Feral Pigeon  
Spotted Turtle-dove  
Crested Pigeon  
Galah  
Rainbow Lorikeet  
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet  
Cockatiel  
Pale-headed Rosella  
Red-rumped Parrot  
Laughing Kookaburra  
White-backed Swallow  
Tree Martin  
Richard's Pigit  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Rufous Whistler  
Grey Fantail

Willie Wagtail  
White-browed Scrubwren  
White-throated Gerygone  
Yellow-rumped Thornbill  
Noisy Friarbird  
Noisy Miner  
Yellow-faced Honeyeater  
Mistletoebird  
Striated Pardalote  
Silvereye  
House Sparrow  
Double-barred Finch  
Common Starling  
Common Mynah  
Figbird  
Australian Magpie-lark  
Grey Butcherbird  
Pied Butcherbird  
Australian Magpie  
Pied Currawong  
Torresian Crow

FIELD DAY FOR SEPTEMBER.

Date: Sunday, September 21st, 1980

Place: Atlas trip to Acland area.

Assembly Point: Pigott's Car Park.

Time: 8.15am for departure at 8.30am sharp.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED.

Urimbirra. June/July/August  
Darling Downs Naturalist. June  
Toowoomba Field Nats. Newsletter. June.  
Q.O.S. Newsletter. June/July.  
Bird Observer. July/August.  
ECCS. August.

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TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB ANNUAL MEETING.

VENUE: 2 Lech St. Toowoomba.

DATE: Saturday, October 18th. 1980.

TIME: 7.30 p.m.

AGENDA.

- 1) Minutes of previous meeting.
- 2) President's Report.
- 3) Editor's Report.
- 4) Treasurer's Report.
- 5) Business arising from minutes.
- 6) Election of Officers.
- 7) General Business

Meeting Closes.

Finalisation of arrangements for Fifth Annual Bird Count.  
Guest speaker and film.

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TOOWOOMBA BIRD CLUB.

NOMINATION FOR OFFICE.

I nominate .....for the office of.....  
in the Toowoomba Bird Club for the year 1980/81. Date.....

.....  
(Nominator)

I accept nomination for the office of.....  
in the Toowoomba Bird Club for the year 1980/81. Date.....

.....  
(Nominee)