



Hunter Bird Observers Club

NEWSLETTER NO. 3/86 April 1986 (Released monthly
at Club nights.)

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1. NOTES FROM MARCH MEETING 12/3/86:

a) Attendance - 49 people, this included three visitors and our guest speaker.

b) Bird Call of the Evening: Presented by Sue Hamonet: The Stubble Quail (*Coturnix pectoralis*) is a bird we hope to see at our Easter camp at Munghorn, and Sue played its clear, whistling 'pippy-wheat' call for us tonight. The Stubble Quail is perhaps our best known quail, having a very wide distribution, but like all quails is seldom seen until flushed. Its clear, brisk call is quite a contrast to that of the Brown Quail (December's bird call), and Sue played this one again so that we could hear the difference. It should be easy to recognise the 'pippy-wheat' sound when we hear this well-hidden bird calling.

c) Bird of the Evening - Presented by Ruth Parker: The distinctively coloured Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*) has recently been seen at Nelson Bay (where it is nest-building) and at Bolwarra (earning its common name of Banana-bird by feasting on ripening bunches of bananas in the garden), but the account given tonight was mostly referring to birds seen in the Northern Territory. The blue to dark blue facial skin patch which gives the bird its name covers almost half the head area and stands out sharply against the white, black, grey and olive-yellow plumage. It is one of the larger honeyeaters, and ranges over the top part of Australia, widely down the east coast and across N.S.W. to the western corner of Victoria.

d) Observations - There have been some interesting observations made this month, including three Crested Hawks in Blackbutt. Members are reminded that sightings made of migratory birds late in the season should be recorded, as it is just as important to record the last sighting of the year as the first.

e) Scientific Names - Presented by Ed Hamonet: The logic behind the scientific classification of Cuckoo-shrikes was defined by Ed, and as the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike is always seen on field days its good to have this background knowledge. These birds are neither 'cuckoos' or 'shrikes' and belong to the family Campephagidae (caterpillar-eater). This genus contains the four Cuckoo-shrikes and the Cicadabird - genus *Coracina* (crow like):

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike - *Coracina novaehollandiae*. Discovered in Tasmania and named after the new country New Holland.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike - *C. papuensis*. First found in Papua-New Guinea hence the specific name.

Yellow-eyed Cuckoo-shrike - *C. lineata* (lined) so named because of the barring which appears on the underparts.

Ground Cuckoo-shrike - *C. maxima* (large/great) appropriately named because it is the largest of the Cuckoo-shrikes.

Cicadabird - *C. tenuirostris* (slender bill). The bill is more slender than in the other members of this genus.

f) Japanese Snipe Specimen - This beautifully mounted specimen is now ready and Kay Imrie brought it along so that we could admire it before presenting it to the Shortland Wetlands Centre. The cost was fully subscribed by members' donations.

g) Main Feature - Presented by Jeff Hardy.

Jeff is the Administrative Officer (Wild Life) of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Sydney. His leisure time interest is studying birds, especially raptors, and for some years he has been netting, banding, and studying birds in the vicinity of the Blue Mountains and areas around Mudgee (including Munghorn Gap). The slides he showed us covered a wide selection of birds which inhabit the escarpments, forests, gullies and open country. Jeff's methods for netting raptors vary according to the particular bird's hunting style, and he says that most of these fierce looking birds are quite docile and easily handled when netted. Other slides showed clearly differences in plumage of male and female birds, especially of thornbills. Jeff also gave an account of a survey in which he took part during November last year on Lord Howe Island. The captive breeding programme to reinstate the Wood Hens on the Island was begun with three pairs of the birds in 1981, when only 17 were found to have survived there. This recent survey found 105 of these charming little birds now back in their natural environment. Because of the tame and friendly nature of the Wood Hens, they are now carefully guarded by the people living on the Island and are a great tourist attraction. Jeff finished his talk by showing us some tantalizing glimpses of birds of the far west of New South Wales, including the Eyrean Grasswren, White-winged Wren and Black Honeyeater. Altogether a most interesting programme and many thanks to Jeff Hardy.

2. FEEDING OUR NATIVE BIRDS - DO'S AND DONT'S.

On a recent visit to Taronga Park Zoo with the Aviculture Society of Central Coast our group talked with Graeme Phipps (Curator of Birds) about the breeding programme for the future. He outlined his hopes for a much more efficient bird house, laboratory and food preparation area. He told us of the need to learn more about our native species and the extreme importance of breeding them in captivity. Loss of habitat was the reason given and accepted as being the major cause of the decline of our native birds and so members asked if it was preferable to attract native birds to our suburban gardens. His reply could be summed up as follows:

a) The planting of native trees and shrubs to attract honeyeaters, wrens and small insectivorous birds was acceptable provided the blossoms were not sprayed (to kill insect pests) and the birds also did not attract feral (or domestic) cats.

b) These birds, along with lorikeets in particular, should NOT be fed unless the mixture given was one used by experienced lorikeet keepers. Taronga Zoo receives between 30 and 50 lorikeets (mainly Rainbow) each year suffering from acute calcium deficiency. This results in the birds developing clenched feet and other arthritic complaints (rickets). It was pointed out that birds in the North Sydney area were being fed in numerous suburban gardens on a mixture of bread, water and honey or sugar. This practice is entirely unacceptable as it endangers the health of the birds who soon take the easy food in preference to their native diet. Instead of the native diet being supplemented with a little extra

from well meaning people, this food was the mainstay and was being supplemented by very few natural foods. Any mixture containing honey is actually illegal as it contravenes laws relating to the spread of bee diseases. If these nectar eaters are to be fed at all, the following mixture widely used by lorikeet breeders may be given:

- 2kg. raw sugar
- 500grms. dried malt powder
- 100grms. skim milk powder
- 4 packets baby cereal (eg. Farex, rice cereal, mixed cereal)
- 1 level teaspoon vitamin supplement powder eg. "Ornithon", "V Mix" or similar
- 1 level teaspoon brewers yeast.

These ingredients are thoroughly mixed dry and can be stored in ice cream containers or other suitable receptacles. The mixture is made up for feeding as follows:

1. Place two diced apples in blender
2. Add three crushed weetbix biscuits
3. Add one cup of the above dry mixture
4. Fill remainder of blender with water and blend
5. Pour into large receptacle and add one blender full of cool (but not freezing) water.
6. Stir until mixed through.

This amount feeds about fifteen lorikeets for one day and must be made up fresh each day of feeding. The dry mixture only can be stored and all remaining made-up mixture should be discarded if not used or eaten.

It was also brought to notice that other birds such as Kookaburras, Magpies, etc. were also often brought to the Zoo suffering from the same complaints as the lorikeets (calcium deficiency). This occurs due to the birds being given mince or raw meat straight from the refrigerator. Again these so-called "tidbits" become the major food source as the birds "do the rounds" of the neighbourhood collecting the most appealing morsels from each station. These easily acquired foods are fed to the young who can suffer deficiencies from lack of variety found in natural diets. If these birds are to be fed at all, then raw mince meat from the fridge is out. One of the high protein dog foods ("Pal") is quite suitable and also contains vitamins, minerals etc. Meaty Bites or "Good O's" are also acceptable but best of all was found to be crickets, grasshoppers, worms, beetles, lizards, mice, etc. for the Kookaburras, and nectar from Eucalyptus blossoms and native fruits and berries for the lorikeets.

- Bill Boyd:

3. REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE:

Double-banded Dotterel (*Charadrius bicinctus*) - Since the late 1970's Double-banded Dotterels have been colour-banded in both Australia and New Zealand to help in studies of breeding biology and migration. During 1985 some 1,000 birds were banded in N.Z. and 260 in Australia. During winter 1986 observers are requested to check for colour-banded birds. New Zealand bands are white, yellow, red, dark blue, dark green and metal. Australian bands are metal, and three different colours on each bird - red, dark blue, pale green or white. When noting banded birds the information required is: date; locality; number of birds checked; number of birds banded and band combinations, eg:

Left leg: red over white over blue;

Right leg: metal; observer's name and address.

Records to: V.W.S.G. C/- Dr. C. Minton, 165 Dalgetty Rd.,

Beaumaris, Victoria 3193.

4. FIELD DAY at POKOLBIN STATE FOREST, Sunday 23rd March:

The morning was fresh and cool when 23 of us gathered at our first viewing spot -- the lake opposite Hungerford Hill vineyard at Pokolbin. Here we saw a good selection (25 species) of ducks and waders (including a flock of 15 Grass Whistle-ducks), 20 passerines, and the melodious notes of the Pied Butcherbird were heard. Along the Broke Road we turned off through private property to reach the edge of Pokolbin State Forest. The morning was warming up as we walked off into the dry sclerophyll woodland (very dry!). Many trees carried mistletoe, among which were honeyeaters: Brown-headed, White-eared, Yellow-tufted, Yellow-faced, White-naped, and Eastern Spinebills. The most notable sighting of the morning was a number of Spotted Quail-thrushes. These birds' habitat is dry stony ridges where their colouring enable them to fade into the background, but once picked out among the leaf litter, stones and dry grass they are seen to be 25-28cm. long with beautifully marked plumage. Lunch in a shady spot was very welcome and a cool breeze made conditions pleasant. Bird roll-call revealed that 11 non-passerines and 48 passerines had been sighted in the Forest area, which, together with those seen at the lake, made an overall total of 90 species - not a bad result for a hot day.

Ruth Parker.

5. COMING EVENTS:

SUNDAY 20th APRIL

- Field Day to ELLALONG. Meet at Edgeworth "Oasis" opposite Hotel at 7.30 a.m. or Cessnock Swimming Pool at 8.15 a.m. Contact - Rosemary Waymark 751819.

ANZAC WEEK-END
25-27th APRIL

- CAMP at CURRICABARK/WOKO NATIONAL PARK. Contact and travel details - Kay Imrie 524524. (Camp fees: 50c. per person per camp, maximum \$2 family).

QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY
WEEK-END CAMP
7-9th JUNE

- CAMP at SMITH'S LAKE FIELD STATION (University of N.S.W.) Cost \$3 per person per night (includes dormitory accommodation, use of kitchen, etc.) Details - Kay Imrie 524524.

SUNDAY 25th MAY

- 10TH ANNIVERSARY - Field Day at NESCA PARK, SWANSEA SOUTH (BARGOED HOUSE). Barbeque Lunch - B.Y.O. + firewood. Meet 8 a.m. at locked gates. Latecomers may leave cars outside gates. Contact Wilma Barden 573928.

SUNDAY 22nd JUNE

- Field Day at HEXHAM SWAMP. Meet 8 a.m. McDonalds, Hexham. Contact Sue Hamonet 581023

MONDAY 12TH MAY

- Management Committee Meeting - Garden Suburb Public School at 5.30 p.m.

WEDNESDAY 14th MAY

- CLUB NIGHT - "Some Curious and Unusual Nests of Australian Birds" to be presented by member Arthur Williams. Garden Suburb Public School at 7.30 p.m.

SPECIAL NOTICE--CHANGE OF VENUE FOR CLUB NIGHTS:

BEGINNING IN JUNE, CLUB NIGHTS WILL BE HELD AT THE SHORTLAND WETLANDS CENTRE, SANDGATE ROAD, SHORTLAND. COMMITTEE MEETINGS WILL CONTINUE AT GARDEN SUBURB SCHOOL -- ALL MEMBERS WELCOME.