

A breeding record for Topknot Pigeon in the Hunter Region

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This note documents a breeding record of Topknot Pigeon *Lopholaimus antarcticus* in Booti Booti National Park in 1986. The sighting of a pre-fledged Topknot Pigeon in Booti Booti National Park was only the second confirmed breeding record for the species in the Hunter Region.

On 1 November 1986, I was approached by a camper at The Ruins camping ground in Booti Booti National Park, to rescue a bird that was sitting on the mast of his yacht. He claimed the bird had been “blown out of a nest”. The Ruins camping ground is approximately 17 km south of Forster on the Mid-North coast of NSW (32° 18.64'S, 152° 31.19'E).

The bird was a pre-fledged Topknot Pigeon that did not try to fly or attempt to get away when I caught it. I placed it in a tree to photograph it then, by means of an extension ladder I was able to place the bird into a Paperbark Tree *Melaleuca quinquenervia* close to what appeared to be the nest it had “fallen” from. The nest was approximately 10 m above the ground and bulky, unlike pigeon nests I had seen previously that tended to be frail. After a short period an adult Topknot Pigeon came and perched alongside the bird. A few days later the bird and the adult had gone.



Pre-fledged Topknot Pigeon found in The Ruins camping ground 1 November 1986.

In 1986 large flocks of Topknot Pigeons were recorded in the Booti Booti National Park in March and September to November. In July and August birds were observed in low numbers. By the end of September a flock of 50 birds was recorded. On 23 October 1986 a flock of 200+ was noted. On 13 November 1986 a flock of 100+ was still present in the park. However, by the beginning of December all Topknot Pigeons had left the area.

Frith (1982, p. 141), in describing the breeding behaviour of Topknot Pigeon in Australia, found that “In late August, the flock moved on but the mated pairs (several attended by flying young) remained”. This is contrary to my findings where the flock appeared to wait for the young bird to “mature” before moving on.

The first confirmed breeding record of Topknot Pigeon in the Hunter Region was reported by Gogerley (1925) who found a number of nests with eggs and a chick at Wallis Lake. He stated that thousands of the birds came to Wallis Lake in 1925. Gogerley found Topknot Pigeons nesting in June as well as October. His paper infers that they were found on his property *Ellerslie* but does not state this. The paper only states the months when he found the birds nesting not the year(s). *Ellerslie* is on the south-western shore of Wallis Lake and is approximately 4 km west of The Ruins camping ground. It is adjacent to what is now known as Wallingat National Park and both the property and the park would most likely have contained suitable nesting habitat for Topknot Pigeon.

On the subject of Topknot Pigeon nests, Gogerley (1925, p. 277) stated: “Almost all the nests I have seen have been bulky...” therefore the assumption I made about the nest in which I placed the young bird appeared correct. However, on 8 November 1986 I found that the nest I had placed the bird near, was that of Grey Butcherbirds *Cracticus torquatus* with two fledglings. Another nest was found lower in the tree that was relatively frail that

was then considered more probably the actual Topknot Pigeon's nest.

Gogerley (1925) also found a nest with two eggs occupied by a Wonga Pigeon *Leucosarcia melanoleuca*. On the ground beneath the nest the remains of a Topknot Pigeon egg was found leading him to assume that the nest had previously been occupied by a Topknot Pigeon.

Gogerley (1925, p. 227) said "In many cases I have been able to see into the nests by standing in the saddle when on horse-back" whereas Frith (1982, p. 141) said "The nests reported were 30m or more above the ground". Higgins & Davies (1996) stated that nests are usually in the crown of a tree. There is obviously much variation in both the nest size and structure and its height above ground. However the use of a *Melaleuca* sp. tree at Booti Booti National Park is in agreement with Gogerley (1925, p. 276) who said "The first nest was built in a paper-bark tree" He also reported finding nests in a brush box tree, a lilli-pilli tree, a forest oak and in a parasitic fig tree.

According to Higgins & Davies (1996, p. 1014), the breeding season for Topknot Pigeons in NSW is "eggs, late Oct., early Nov. and Dec". This record conforms to that time frame.

Morris (2010) mistakenly reported the first Hunter Region breeding record for Topknot Pigeon based on a report from Stuart (2006). This record at Branxton on 25 August and 29 September 2005 was of a Topknot Pigeon on a nest but did not confirm eggs or chicks. Stuart (2006, p. 41) included the comment: "Although it is likely that the birds bred, this is not considered to be a definite breeding record." Morris (2010) was also apparently unaware of the earlier report of Gogerley (1925).

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