

C O N T E N T S

VOLUME 15 - NUMBER 1

Garnett, S. Heronies of the Mitchell River Delta	1
Nix, H.A. The Fairy Gerygone at Tin Can Bay	4
Garnett, S. and R. Bredl. Birds in the vicinity of Edward River Settlement, Part 1	6
<i>Corrigendum</i>	23
Mystery Photographs	24

VOLUME 15 - NUMBER 2

Garnett, S. and R. Bredl. Birds in the vicinity of Edward River Settlement	25
Atherton, R.G., D.S. Reimer, T.J. Pulsford and M.C. Sawle. The White-winged Tern <i>Chlidonias</i> <i>leucoptera</i> in south-western Queensland, Diamantina Shire	41
Strong, M. and E. Cuffe. Drongos pursue Micro- chiroptera	42
Mystery Photographs	44

VOLUME 15 - NUMBER 3

Palliser, T. The Queensland Ornithological Society Bird Report, 1984	45
Strong, M. and E. Cuffe. Petal Display by the Variegated Wren	71
Mystery Photographs	72

VOLUME 15 - NUMBER 4

Moverley, J.H. Winter bird observations for cays in the southern section of the Swain Reefs, Queensland	73
Prendergast, H.D.V., A. Brooks and I.M. Taylor. Summer wader counts on Tryon Island, Capri- corn Group	80
Longmore, N.W. Two new records of the Short-tailed Shearwater from North Queensland	84
Book Review	85
Mystery Photographs	86

THE SUNBIRD

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HERONIES OF THE MITCHELL RIVER DELTA

STEPHEN GARNETT

The Mitchell River flows west from the Atherton Tableland towards the Gulf of Carpentaria (Fig.1). Eleven kilometres from the coast the main stream divides to form a broad delta, one arm winding away south and collecting the waters of Bosworth and Magnificent creeks, one arm branching north to anastomose with the lower reaches of the Coleman River, and the main channel heading straight out to sea. Around and between these larger waterways are a host of narrow mangrove-lined channels. During 1979 Mr Robert Bredl, formerly of Edward River Crocodile Farm, travelled throughout the waterways of this delta and located three major heronies (Fig.1). On his information I visited these heronies in the company of Mr David Carter between 31 March and 4 April 1981. Approximate numbers of nests at each of the three are listed in Table 1. Estimates are of limited accuracy as visits were necessarily brief because of the crocodiles, which congregate beneath the heronies, and because the tide prevented full exploration of the mangroves through which the nests were scattered.

Heronry 1, at the junction of the north and main Mitchell Rivers, was located in a 10m tall patch of *Avicennia eucalyptifolia* bordered on the side adjacent to the river by *Rhizophora* and, on the landward side, by *Lumnitzera* and a lower *Avicennia* forest. In the tallest forest, egrets and comorants were mixed; all had advanced young. The Pied Herons had eggs or newly hatched young in the *Lumnitzera* while the Sacred Ibis had eggs in nests overhanging the deeper water. All Darter nests found were in a single *Avicennia* leaning well out from the stream bank opposite the main herony: 6 nests had eggs, 2 had eggs and young.

Heronry 2 was in a side branch of the main Mitchell River, north of the mouth. The *Avicennia* in this area were also higher than

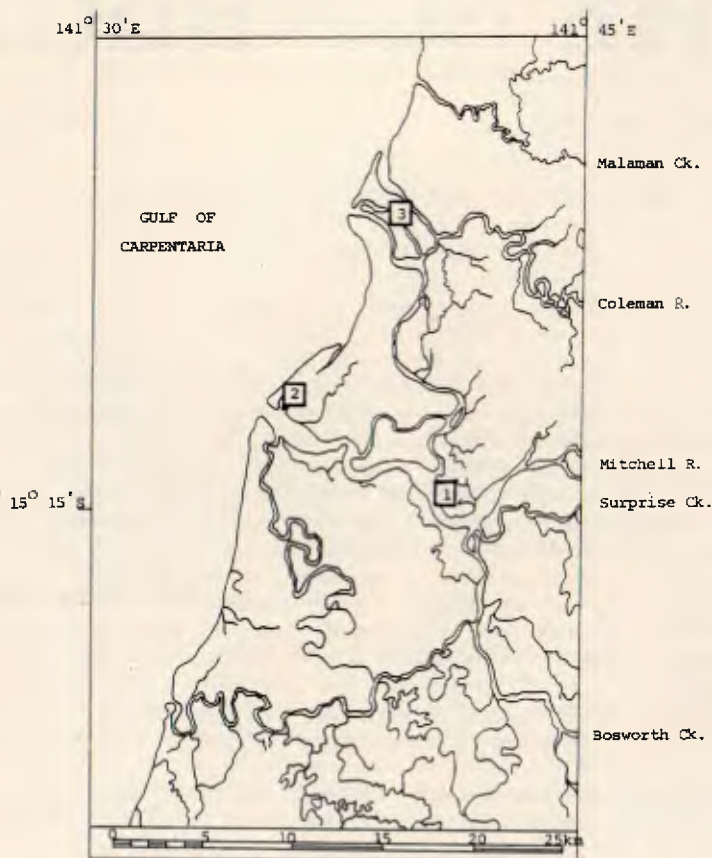


Figure 1. Sites of heronies on the Mitchell River Delta

those surrounding them. The egrets and cormorants were again concentrated in the taller trees but many egret nests were also in *Rhizophora* beside the open water. The Royal Spoonbills and some Sacred Ibises had nests along several mangrove-lined channels leading away from the main colony while the Rufous Night Herons were alone in an area of tall mangroves into which the tide rarely entered. Pied Herons had nests 30 m away from open

water. Although these nests contained young chicks like those in heronry 1, there were several hundred Pied Herons with immature plumage feeding in the vicinity.

Heronry 3 was visited only briefly and was found to contain almost exclusively Royal Spoonbills and Little Pied Cormorants. The colony was built on an island formed at the confluence of the north Mitchell and Coleman Rivers at a point where the mangroves were particularly dense.

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF NESTS IN HERONRIES OF THE MITCHELL RIVER DELTA

SPECIES	HERONRY		
	1	2	3
Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	8	45	10
Little Black Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	300	500	
Little Pied Cormorant <i>P. melanoleucos</i>	200	250	600
Pied Heron <i>Ardea picata</i>	100	150	
Great Egret <i>Egretta alba</i>		300	
Little Egret <i>E. garzetta</i>		700	
Intermediate Egret <i>E. intermedia</i>	300	200	
Rufous Night Heron <i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>		80	
Sacred Ibis <i>Threskiornis aethiopia</i>	25	40	
Royal Spoonbill <i>Platalea regia</i>		400	800
TOTAL	933	2665	1410

The three colonies appear to be the only ones between the Edward River, 80 km north of the Mitchell River and Topsy Creek, 35 km to the south. During the breeding season parties of cormorant, heron, ibis and spoonbill were frequently seen flying south over Edward River Settlement in the evening and north again in the morning. These birds were thought to be commuting from the Mitchell River heronries, making them highly significant focal points in the extensive system of seasonal freshwater swamps of south western Cape York Peninsula. There have been few reports of heronries containing nests of the Pied Heron (Ey 1976). The Intermediate Egret has previously been

found breeding in the southwest of the peninsula (Kikkawa 1976).

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THE FAIRY GERYGONE AT TIN CAN BAY

H.A. NIX

As Julian Ford (1978) has demonstrated, the former Black-throated Warbler *Gerygone palpebrosa* and Fairy Warbler *G. flavida* are end members of the clinally varying population, now to be known as the Fairy Gerygone *Gerygone palpebrosa*. The distinctive throat markings of northern males become attenuated towards the south, but a residual pattern can be detected even in the southernmost populations. In the non-breeding season this species is frequently found in mixed-species feeding flocks, where it is repetitive clock-work-like warbling appears to play an important role in both attracting and maintaining the presence of other species. The calls of such core or foundation species of mixed species feeding flocks are of great value when using playback techniques for rapid surveys. Recorded call sequences of the Fairy Gerygone are quite outstanding in this respect and will rapidly attract most species of insectivorous birds up to whistler-shrike thrush size in the vicinity. I have made extensive use of this characteristic in devising rapid reconnaissance survey techniques.

The southern limit of the Fairy Gerygone's range was thought to be in the Rockhampton region at around 23°20'S, where it is widely distributed in vine thicket remnant vegetation. The Australian Museum survey of rainforest fauna in 1975 (Broadbent and Clark, 1976) found the species at Rundle Range (23°29'S ; 150°50'E) and further south at Eurimbula (24°11'S ; 151°50'E). On November 23, 1981, I found pairs of this species in littoral vine thickets around the small township of 1770 near Round Hill Head (24°11'S ; 151°54'E): again at Eurimbula and further inland towards Miriamvale in fringing rainforest along Baffle Creek

(24°21'S ; 151°36'E).

Some days later during a survey of the Wide Bay Defence Training Area I sampled some well developed stands of littoral vine thicket and forest evident on aerial photographs. This necessitated the hire of a fishing boat at Tin Can Bay and travel north along the Great Sandy Strait between Fraser Island and the mainland. Wading ashore through a wide belt of mangroves proved less difficult than expected and just beyond the low foredune was an interdune swale with a well developed strip of vine-forest with dense stands of Piccabeen Palm *Archontophoenix cunninghamii*. Playback of the Fairy Gerygone call sequence produced a rather agitated pair of Fairy Gerygones. This was at 0830 hours on November 26, 1981. Another pair was recorded at the next site further inland on older dunes with very large trees of *Callitris* and *Tristania* with rainforest understorey. These sites were at 25°49'S ; 152°59'E.

Returning towards Tin Can Bay we put ashore twice more. The final site was due north of the township across the inlet at 25°54'S ; 153°01'E. The vegetation was more open with *Eucalyptus tereticornis*, *E. intermedia* and *Callitris* and *Tristania* in the upper canopy, but with areas of denser undergrowth of *Melaleuca* and *Leptospermum* and some rainforest elements. Once again playback of the calling sequence yielded a pair of Fairy Gerygones. In all three cases it is presumed that the birds were breeding as they were otherwise quiet, making a quick approach to the source of disturbance and as quickly departing. No follow up was possible because of time limitations.

As far as is known the Fairy Gerygone is sedentary and is not known to make seasonal movements. Thus, these records indicate a significant southward extension of known range and are included in the Atlas of Australian Birds (Blakers *et al*, 1984). Although the final site occurs in the same 1° grid cell as Fraser Island I am not aware of any records from the Island. Certainly similar littoral vine thicket and dune rainforest occur in the Cooloola National Park. The latter is well known ornithologically but there are no published records of the Fairy Gerygone. Perhaps the playback technique is worth a try!

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BIRDS IN THE VICINITY OF EDWARD RIVER SETTLEMENT

PART I. INTRODUCTION, METHODS, STUDY AREA,
LIST OF NON-PASSERINES

STEPHEN GARNETT and ROBERT BREDL

INTRODUCTION

Edward River settlement (14°52'S, 141°37'E) is situated nearly halfway up the west coast of Cape York peninsula on the northern bank of the Chapman River. The only ornithological work in the area was done by Thomson (1935) who collected birds between August and October 1928 as he travelled down the Coleman River and up the coast to the Edward River. In the 1960's studies on bird-transmitted diseases and avian nasal mites were conducted at Kowanyama, 70 km south of Edward River settlement (Standfast 1965, Domrow 1966). Kikkawa (1976) summarised all records available from south-western Cape York peninsula, a region which includes the settlement. The birds in the degree square covered by this paper are given in the RAOU Atlas of Australian birds (Blakers *et al.* 1984), but this paper describes their distributions in more detail and also lists those birds that were expected, searched for but never found. Existing records contain few descriptions of seasonal variation in numbers, breeding times or habitat. The paucity of information available regarding mangrove birds along the west coast of Cape York peninsula has been pointed out by

Schodde *et al.* (1982), a comment equally true of other groups of birds. Since Edward River is at the northern limit of the major east-west division in Australian avian biogeography (Kikkawa and Pearse 1969), the aim of this paper is to throw further light on the birds of this important region.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The area in which observations were made is illustrated in Fig.1. Climatically Edward River settlement is within the wet-dry tropics. The wet season lasts from December to April while from May to November is mostly dry. Climatic information is available for slightly drier Kowanyama, 70 km south which has 1066 mm (88% of the annual average) of its rain in the wet season. Temperatures are usually high with a mean maximum of 36.9°C in October and 30.9°C in July and mean minimum of 24.1°C in November and 14.8°C in July.

The areas visited fall within the Battersea, Cumbulla, Inkerman and Mottle land systems described by Galloway *et al.* (1970) and the vegetation has also been described on a broad scale by Pedley and Isbell (1971).

The major habitats in the area are distributed parallel to the coast. A strip of shell grit dunes overlying alluvial muds run in a band 1 to 3 km wide along the coast. The most littoral dunes support a strand community dominated by *Casuarina equisetifolia*. Further inland, the dune crests are clothed in a low semi-deciduous dune woodland (Pedley and Isbell 1971) dominated by such trees as *Ficus virens*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Sterculia quadrifida* and *Gyrocarpus americanus* while the swales contain ephemeral swamps surrounded by *Melaleuca leucadendron*, *Eucalyptus tessellaris*, *Pandanus* sp. and occasional *Livistona* sp. East of the first dunes is a band of exposed hyper-saline mud up to 1 km wide which is inundated by seasonal spring tides or wet season rains, but for much of the year is bare and dry. Fringing the salt flats are extensive grass/sedge plains which form freshwater swamps dominated by *Eleocharis dulcis* where the water lies longest. A second, much older, dune system lies to the east of the salt flats and is dominated by *Eucalyptus polycarpa* and *E. tessellaris* with smaller numbers of *Parinari nonda* and *Erythrophloeum chlorostachys* forming a tall woodland. To the east of the dunes is a broad alluvial plain on which grows a sparse to open woodland dominated by several species of *Melaleuca*. Both the eucalypt and *Melaleuca* woodland have a tall grass layer

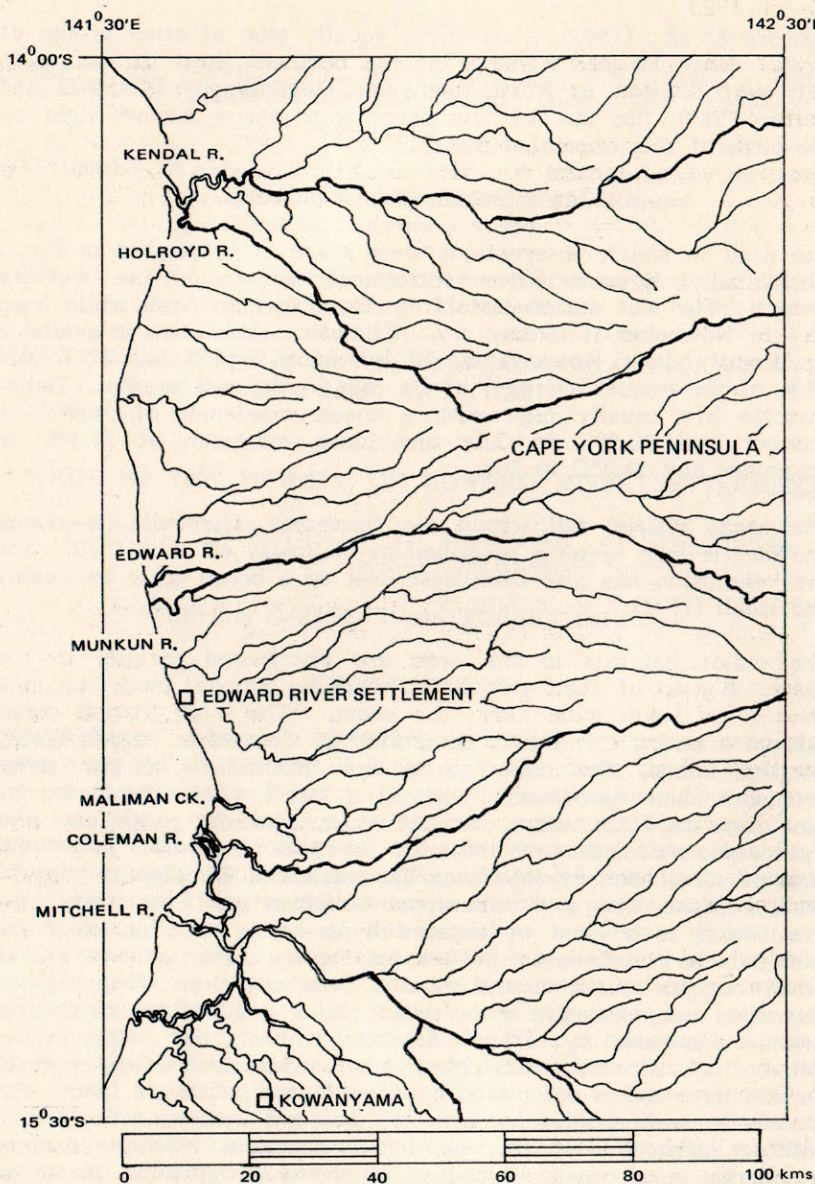


Figure 1. Map of the Edward River Area

during the wet season that dries up between April and June and is usually burnt at some point between July and November.

Dissecting the parallel bands of habitat are the rivers and creeks which meander across the alluvial plain. Most cease flowing by May but retain fresh water in small lagoons and waterholes throughout the dry season. In their upper reaches most streams are lined with several species of *Melaleuca*, particularly *M.sten-ostachya*. The streams are salty for several kilometres from the sea. *Avicennia* and *Lumnitzera* are the major mangrove genera on the most landward of the saltwater channels, but near the mouth *Rhizophora*, *Bruguiera* and *Xylocarpus* form increasingly complex mangrove communities. *Avicennia* again becomes dominant near the sea and 4 km south of the Chapman River an extensive, essentially pure, stand of *Avicennia* has developed on the coast. Up to 400 m wide, this stand extends almost as far south as the mouth of the Maliman River. North of the Chapman, mangroves do not encroach on the bare shell and sand of the beach.

STG worked at Edward River settlement between mid-March and mid-October with additional visits for periods between 1 and 4 weeks during December 1979, March and June 1981 and October 1983. On each occasion STG travelled extensively in the immediate vicinity with occasional longer trips further afield. RB lived at Edward River settlement from 1974 to 1982 exploring the surrounding area thoroughly.

The intensity of observation declined the greater the distance from the settlement with only two visits by STG to the Mitchell River delta, in October and March, and two to the Edward River (some distance from Edward River settlement), in August and September. The area examined with greatest diligence was between the Munkun and the Maliman Rivers extending from the coast up to 15 km inland.

LIST OF NON-PASSERINE

Emu *Dromaius novaehollandiae* Hunted avidly and now very scarce. Although considered relatively common by Thomson (1935), we saw only two in low open woodland 20 km from the settlement.

Hoary-headed Grebe *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* One caught in Mitchell River, June 1978.

Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* Sparsely distributed on freshwater lagoons. Seen only during May and June.

Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* Small numbers at sea and on freshwater lagoons throughout the year. Thousands present during 1978, many of which died. Two flocks of 500+ individuals present in early May and late June 1980. Movement often at night.

Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* Small numbers present on most freshwater lagoons throughout the dry season. Downy young at Communal nesting sites in Mitchell River delta, March 1981. Also breeds beside Edward and Maliman Rivers.

Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax varius* A pair nearly always present at Chapman River mouth. Usually seen at sea but seen many kilometres upstream in years when bait fish are rare.

Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris* Flocks of up to 400 birds seen on freshwater lagoons at all times of year. Breeding colony in Mitchell River delta, March 1981. Also breeds at the mouth of the Edward River.

Little Pied Cormorant *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos* Single birds or small flocks commonly seen on freshwater lagoons. Large groups of up to 20 birds seen flying at dawn and dusk. Three breeding colonies active in Mitchell River delta, March 1981. Also breeds at the mouth of the Edward River.

Least Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* Small numbers seen over beach and out at sea during August and September. More common during rough weather from January to April.

Great-billed Heron *Ardea sumatrana* Pairs resident at intervals of about 5 km along the estuarine reaches of each river.

Pacific Heron *Ardea pacifica* Scattered individuals on freshwater lagoons. Most abundant between June and September.

White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae* Common on tidal salt flats behind the mangroves but also seen on freshwater lagoons and by the sea in groups of up to 10 birds.

Pied Heron *Ardea picata* Flocks of up to 300 present on freshwater lagoons near the sea between March and May of which 20%

had white heads. Most of these immatures disappeared after May and the few that remained had grey crowns by September. Small breeding colony at Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Cattle Egret *Ardeola Ibis* A single individual in breeding plumage seen in October 1983.

Great Egret *Egretta alba* Small number always present on freshwater lagoons and by the sea. Breeding on Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Plentiful around shallow lagoons, along river mudflats and on the beach. Breeding on Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* Flocks of up to 100 birds present on freshwater lagoons between March and June, flock sizes declining thereafter. Forages in taller vegetation than other egrets. Breeding on Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Striated Heron *Eutorides striatus* Common in all regularly inundated mangroves. Nesting solitarily March 1980 and 1981 beside most estuarine rivers.

Rufous Night Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus* Plentiful on freshwater swamps. Roosts in mangroves and dense creekside vegetation. Breeding Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* Moderately common along creeks and the upper reaches of estuaries. Solitary nests found March 1980 and March 1981.

Black-necked Stork *Xenorhynchus asiaticus* Sparsely distributed in shallow fresh and salt water, becoming concentrated into groups of up to 20 birds by the late dry season. Immatures more numerous than adults between March and July. The leg sinews are valued for binding barbs to spears (M. Edwards pers. comm.) but it is also eaten.

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Flocks of 300+ common in freshwater swamps during March and April, smaller groups by larger swamps from May onwards.

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica* In mangroves and vegetated freshwater throughout the year. Small colonial breeding groups in Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis* Flocks of up to 100 present in damp grassland between March and August. None seen after September.

Royal Spoonbill *Platalea regia* In small parties March to May on freshwater swamps; flocks of 100+ present on larger lagoons thereafter. Two large breeding colonies on Mitchell River delta, March 1981.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill *Platalea flavipes* A few birds present on most large bodies of freshwater throughout the year.

Magpie Goose *Anseranas semipalmata* Flocks of 1000+ breeding on seasonal freshwater swamps south of the Chapman River and north of the Munkun River between December and April. Only two flocks, both of fewer than 10 birds, seen between March and October.

Wandering Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata* Flocks of up to 25, usually only in pairs, seen occasionally on freshwater swamps and lagoons between March and July. More common on water-holes near the Edward River. Extensively hunted for food.

Plumed Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna eytoni* Flocks of 1000+ at waterholes near the Edward River and south of the Coleman River during the wet season. None were seen closer to Edward River settlement.

Black Swan *Cygnus atratus* A group of 7, including a banded bird, are said to have been shot nearby in 1978 (M. Edwards pers. comm.). Since that year small numbers regularly seen in the district.

Radjah Shelduck *Tadorna radjah* From the wet season until May present in small flocks on freshwater or tidal swamps. During the dry season most congregated in flocks of several hundred on mud and sand flats. Not seen more than 1 km inland. Flightless young present in January 1980 (G. Morris pers. comm.).

Pacific Black Duck *Anas superciliosa* Small numbers present on most bodies of freshwater with some flocks of 200+. Several flocks seen on sand spits in November. Two found in the stomach of a tiger shark, August 1980.

Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons* Flocks of 300+ present on the two largest freshwater lagoons in July and August, only small flocks seen at other times of the year. Often seen at sea or on the beach just before the wet season.

Australasian Shoveller *Anas rhynchos* A single flock of 20 sighted at the settlement in April 1980.

Pink-eared Duck *Malacorhynchus membranaceus* Small numbers present on seasonal freshwater swamps shortly after the wet season.

Hardhead *Aythya australis* Flocks of up to 100 birds seen at freshwater swamps on several occasions between March and July.

Maned Duck *Chenonetta jubata* Small numbers present on seasonal freshwater swamps shortly after the wet season.

Green Pygmy-Goose *Nettapus pulchellus* Small flocks of up to 30 birds on lily-covered lagoons between March and June but not seen in the late dry season. Flightless downy young seen in March and early April.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* A nest and attendant pair of birds every four or five kilometres along coast between Edward and Mitchell Rivers.

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus notatus* Nesting north of the Munkun River June and July 1978. Not seen at any other time.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Less than 20 around settlement until June and seen in only small numbers in woodland. When the fires started in July, however, flocks of 1000+ kites attended them and frequented the settlement.

Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* Several seen during June and July, both alone and in association with Black Kites.

Black-breasted Buzzard *Hamirostra melanosternon* Seen twice over low *Melaleuca* woodland, once being mobbed by a Black Kite.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* Up to 5 on beach near settlement usually pair scavenging near major river mouths. Breeding during July in *Melaleuca* woodland 200 m from sea.

Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus* The most common kite around settlement from March to May but numbers remained similar throughout the year. Only a few attended fires. Nesting beside creeks and swamps August and September.

Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus* Seen frequently in all forest types at all times of the year.

Collared Sparrowhawk *Accipiter cirrhocephalus* Seen as often as Brown Goshawk in dune woodland but only once in eucalypt woodland.

Grey Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae* One beside Munkun River February and March 1978.

Red Goshawk *Erythrotriorchis radiatus* Single birds seen in creek beside eucalypt woodland in August and October 1980. Not otherwise reported from south western Cape York peninsula.

White-bellied Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* Widely dispersed pairs throughout the area. Nests found every 8 or 10 km along coastal dunes but also seen near large waterholes inland.

Wedge-tailed Eagle *Aquila audax* Seen rarely and then over *Melaleuca* woodland. Numbers have declined since aerial baiting for dingoes with 1080.

Little Eagle *Hieraetus morphnoides* Seen twice over dune woodland near settlement, in March and July.

Spotted Harrier *Circus assimilis* A single bird over grassland between dune woodland and eucalypt woodland in June and July 1980 and October 1983.

Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* Present in small numbers over vegetated swamps from late March to October.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* A single bird seen over dune woodland, April 1980.

Australian Hobby *Falco longipennis* Seen infrequently. In all forest types. Although usually seen in flight, once noticed chasing grasshoppers on the ground.

Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* Always present in both woodland and above grassland but particularly common between May and August. On 1 May 1980, 50+ birds seen flying south over the period of one hour but no concerted movements were seen at other times of the year. Colours varied from pale brown to almost black. Like kites, congregated around grass fires.

Australian Kestrel *Falco cenchroides* Always a few present over grassland although 30 Kestrels accompanied the Brown Falcons on 1 May. From June to October appeared to favour newly burnt grass.

Orange-footed Scrubfowl *Megapodius reinwardt* Regularly flushed from dune woodland as far south as Maliman River. Often three or four individuals attending a single mound.

Australian Brush-turkey *Alectura lathamii* Common in dune woodland as far south as the Maliman River but may extend further. Mounds clustered in patches of dense vegetation.

Brown Quail *Coturnix australis* Flushed frequently from all well-grassed communities.

King Quail *Coturnix chinensis* A family was flushed on Strathgordon Station at the eastern extremity of the region examined. A flightless chick was caught for identification.

Red-backed Button-quail *Turnix maculosa* Several flushed and later viewed at close quarters beneath recently burnt eucalypt woodland in October 1983. There appear to have been no previous records from the area.

Red-chested Button-quail *Turnix pyrrhothorax* During April and May 1980 many hundreds were heard and flushed from damp, heavily grassed *Melaleuca* woodland. Some were also seen with tiny young. By mid June they had become less evident and were not seen again that year or in March 1981. Identification was confirmed when a female was fortuitously caught alive, in flight, from a moving motorbike.

Buff-banded Rail *Rallus phillippensis* Several flushed from damp *Eleocharis* and long grass in May 1980, which are the only records from mainland Cape York peninsula (Kikkawa 1976).

Spotless Crane *Porzana tabuensis* A single bird was caught and photographed at Edward River during the 1978-79 wet season and several were seen subsequently. Not previously seen on Cape York peninsula (Kikkawa 1976) although specimens have been recovered from Torres Strait Islands (Draffan *et al.* 1983).

White-browed Crane *Poliolimnas cinereus* Common and breeding in freshwater swamps during the late wet season. Not seen after April. Not previously recorded from the west coast of Cape York peninsula.

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* Common only during the wet season, especially near Edward and Mitchell Rivers.

Brolga *Grus rubicundus* Pairs dispersed widely across *Eleocharis* dominated freshwater swamps between December and May but gathering into flocks of up to 600 birds on grass plains between the Edward and Munkun rivers and between the Chapman and Maliman rivers from late June to at least October.

Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* Pairs and small parties common in the open *Melaleuca* woodland that covered the eastern part of the region examined. Sarus Cranes also constituted up to 5% of the dry season 'Brolga' flocks. Neither the people at Edward River (M. Edwards pers. comm.) nor those at Kowanyama (J. Woodburn pers. comm.) distinguish linguistically between the two crane species.

Australian Bustard *Ardeotis australis* Of four individuals seen during 1980, two had been shot. All were, or had been, in open *Melaleuca* woodland.

Comb-crested Jacana *Irediparra gallinacea* Numerous pairs with newly hatched young on ephemeral freshwater swamps during March and April. Although the area of habitat declined as the dry season progressed no increase in bird density was seen on remaining lagoons.

Bush Thick-knee *Burhinus magnirostris* During 1980 seen once at night near settlement in March and tracks found in June near Coleman River. Calls never heard.

Beach Thick-knee *Burhinus neglectus* Two pairs occupied the beach between the Chapman and Maliman Rivers. Never seen on the beach between Chapman and Munkun rivers which was much frequented by people.

Pied Oystercatcher *Haematopus longirostris* Two to three pairs always present between Munkun and Maliman rivers.

Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles* Common around wet season swamps until May when flocks of up to 40 birds formed beside remaining freshwater bodies and on the beach. In September all but a few disappeared from the area.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* Always on ocean mudflats. Present throughout the year, a maximum of 19 counted during March.

Lesser Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica* During regular counts of waders between 20 March and 7 October 1980 only one was seen but on 9 October 1983 a flock of 120 was feeding north and south of the Chapman river mouth.

Red-kneed Dotterel *Erythrogonys cinctus* In July 1980 flocks of up to 50 occupied the two remaining shallow freshwater swamps. By late August only a few remained and these, too, disappeared in early September.

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus* The most common small plover on the beach front and salt pans. Numbers peaked in April with far fewer returning in September.

Large Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Often in association with Mongolian Plovers but in half their numbers.

Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus* Common throughout the year on the beach and salt flats. Nests found in March.

Black-fronted Plover *Charadrius melanops* Seen at only one lagoon where present from April to October. A sudden peak of 35 birds occurred in June 1980 but numbers had declined by July.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* At least a hundred always in the vicinity of the settlement on freshwater lagoons, salt pans and on the beach. Numbers peaked at 150 birds during April and May when about a third of the flock members were immature.

Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae* Occasionally individuals or pairs seen on shallow coastal swamps after the wet season.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Three seen just south of the Chapman river in October 1983.

Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* Maximum of about 20 on the beach mudflats north and south of the Chapman river in October but not uncommon between May and August.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Small numbers on beach but more frequently seen on mud banks or perched in mangroves along estuarine rivers.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* A few mixed with other waders along beach front in September and October.

Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos* Isolated individuals at frequent intervals along mangrove-lined rivers. A few also inhabited freshwater swamps.

Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Flocks numbering 200+ used tidal salt flats as they dried out in March and April. Scattered individuals always present on beach mud and by freshwater swamps.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Flocks of 50+ present on several freshwater swamps during July and August. Scattered individuals seen at other times of the year.

Terek Sandpiper *Tringa terek* Small numbers with other waders on beach front.

Snipe *Gallinago* sp. One flushed from damp grassland March 1981.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* Up to 600 on softer mudflats south of Chapman River. A few small flocks on inland tidal salt flats.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* A few seen in association with other beach front waders on two occasions.

Red Knot *Calidris canutus* Small numbers feeding with Great Knot on beach front and nearby salt flats.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* In similar numbers to black-tailed Godwit on beach. Flocks highly mobile, numbers present fluctuating daily.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* Flocks of up to 1000 on salt flats and freshwater swamps in April with smaller number returning to the beach front in September and October.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* The most abundant migratory wader with large numbers on salt flats in April, and on the beach front except between May and August.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Generally uncommon apart from a sudden increase on the salt flats during April. Most birds at that time had traces of breeding plumage.

Sanderling *Calidris alba* 3 seen on beach in October 1983.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* A group of five flushed from a tidal salt flat in December 1979.

Australian Pratincole *Stiltia isabella* Large flocks appearing spasmodically in April over salt flats and from June onwards over recently burnt grasslands.

Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae* In small numbers along coast, never seen inland.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* Abundant over most freshwater lagoons in March and April but only a few remaining by May.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucoptera* During March and April as common as Whiskered Terns over freshwater swamps with many birds in full breeding plumage. The last birds were seen on 1st May. Several hundred seen flying north 300 m out to sea on 26 April.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Numerous birds scattered over coastal mudflats, saltflats and freshwater swamps throughout the year.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Usually a few on beach front and occasionally over freshwater swamps but in April and September 1980 flocks of 40+ were present on the coast.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Always a few just offshore. Nesting in mid-April on sandspits at mouths of Edward and Munkun rivers.

Crested Tern *Sterna bergii* Small numbers present between March and July but after August it was the most abundant tern with flocks of 300+ roosting on the beach.

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* The most common sea tern in March and April but rarely seen between May and August. Flocks of up to 30 birds present between September and December.

Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus regina* A common bird in the dune woodland. More frequently heard than seen.

Torresian Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula spilorrhoa* Surprisingly seen in all dry season months except July and August. However after a flock of 30 was seen flying over the sea on 23 March only three individuals were seen until 1 September. By early October there

were flocks of 50+ in mangroves at the mouth of the Mitchell River. Most frequently seen feeding in *Ficus vérens*.

Peaceful Dove *Geopelia placida* Flocks of between 15 and 50 birds seen in open areas of all wooded habitats. Breeding noted in March.

Diamond Dove *Geopelia cuneata* Seen only in open *Melaleuca* woodland often in association with the more abundant Peaceful Dove.

Bar-shouldered Dove *Geopelia humeralis* Most abundant in dune woodland and on the fringes of mangroves, extending inland in small numbers along water courses.

Squatter Pigeon *Petrophassa scripta* Common in open *Melaleuca* woodland but never seen near the coast.

Palm Cockatoo *Probosciger aterrimus* One bird visited the area in 1973 but stayed only briefly.

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo *Calyptrorhynchus magnificus* Flocks frequently encountered in open *Melaleuca* woodland and occasionally in tall eucalypt woodland and dune woodland. Eggs collected by Thomson (1935) on 3rd September 1928.

Galah *Cacatua roseicapilla* Small flocks of up to 20 birds noted in all habitats, including on the beach, throughout the year.

Little Corella *Cacatua sanguinea* In 1980, numbers around the settlement increasing during the dry season to about 60 birds in October. In October 1983 a flock of 1000+ was present and had defoliated the *Melaleuca leucadendron* in which they had been roosting. A flock of similar size was seen on the Mitchell river delta in October 1980. Never seen far from the coast.

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua galerita* Pairs and small parties seen in all wooded habitats. No large flocks were recorded. Eggs collected 16 September 1928 (Thomson 1935).

Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus* Abundant when *Melaleuca* spp. or *Eucalyptus* spp. in flower. Otherwise only small numbers seen, although present throughout the year.

Varied Lorikeet *Psittenteles versicolor* A flock of 6 seen in late August, then suddenly abundant during September at the time when *Melaleuca stenostachya* first came into flower.

Red-winged Parrot *Aprosmictus erythropterus* Pairs and small parties seen frequently in open *Melaleuca* woodland.

Pale-headed Rosella *Platycercus adscitus* Sparsely distributed through open *Melaleuca* woodland.

Golden-shouldered Parrot *Psephotus chrysopterygius* A flock of about 20 was seen perched in a dead tree at the mouth of the Chapman River in the 1974 wet season and a single bird was flushed from damp grassland studded with *Melaleuca* and the mounds of *Amitermes obtusidens* in March 1981.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus* Seen irregularly in dune woodland and mangroves during the wet season.

Pallid Cuckoo *Cuculus pallidus* Adults numerous in mangroves in March and their arrival audible on 13 September 1980. A young bird was seen being fed by Yellow Honeyeaters in June the same year.

Brush Cuckoo *Cuculus variolosus* Heard infrequently in March, April and October in all wooded habitats. Juvenile fed by Bar-breasted Honeyeater.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo *Cuculus pyrrhophanus* One individual netted 18 April 1980. Present in small numbers in all wooded communities until September.

Black-eared Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx osculans* A single bird seen at the settlement in December 1979.

Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx basalis* Parasitised Black-throated and Mangrove Gerygones in dune woodland and mangroves.

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx lucidus* Seen several times during August in dune woodland and *Melaleuca* woodland.

Gould's Bronze-Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx malayanus* Numerous in April and May in *Melaleuca* woodland and dune woodland.

Common Koe! *Eudynamus scolopacea* Frequent in dune woodland until early April and after October.

Channel-billed Cuckoo *Scythrops novaehollandiae* In 1980 last seen on 29 March returning with many other migrants on 13 September. All records from dune woodland where common during wet season.

Pheasant Coucal *Centropus phasianinus* Resident in dune woodland. Last heard calling in 1980 on 20 March and remaining silent in the grass until 8 September 1980. Nesting during wet season.

Southern Boobook *Ninox novaeseelandiae* Encountered frequently in all wooded habitats.

Barking Owl *Ninox connivens* A few pairs resident in dune woodland between Chapman and Munkun rivers, not seen elsewhere.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba* One seen at night in coastal *Casuarina* in March 1980.

Eastern Grass Owl *Tyto longimembris* At least 6 present along well-grassed coastal dunes between Chapman and Munkun rivers between May and July 1980. Also flushed frequently from other coastal grasslands.

Tawny Frogmouth *Podargus strigoides* Seen infrequently in open woodland communities.

Papuan Frogmouth *Podargus papuensis* Relatively common in dune woodland, often roosting in mangroves. Found nesting on 26 August 1928 (Thomson 1935).

Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* Common in dune woodland. Nest with 2 eggs found in early October 1983.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* Flocks high overhead December 1979 and March 1981.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* Several flocks moved north in late March and early April.

Azure Kingfisher *Ceyx azurea* Common along all water courses including mangrove-lined estuaries and ephemeral wet season swamps. Bred at mouth of Chapman River March 1980.

Little Kingfisher *Ceyx pusilla* One netted in mangroves beside Chapman River April 1980. Never seen or heard elsewhere.

Laughing Kookaburra *Dacelo novaeguineae* Common in all wooded habitats, particularly dune woodland, but less so than Blue-winged Kookaburra. Arrived at Edward River settlement in 1974; absent there in 1928 (Thomson 1935).

Blue-winged Kookaburra *Dacelo leachii* Common in all wooded habitats.

Forest Kingfisher *Halcyon macleayii* The commonest kingfisher in all wooded habitats. Particularly abundant in July.

Red-backed Kingfisher *Halcyon pyrrhopygia* Seen occasionally in open *Melaleuca* woodland.

Sacred Kingfisher *Halcyon sancta* Present from mid-March to early August, particularly in denser vegetation on dunes, along water courses and in the mangroves.

Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris* Present during March and April in mangroves at river mouth. Not seen otherwise.

Rainbow Bee-eater *Merops ornatus* Small flocks present throughout dry season and several flocks of 500+ birds encountered as they roosted in mangroves. In early September flocks of 40+ seen moving consistently south in all areas but a few remaining to nest in late dry season.

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* Common in wooded habitats until 10 April 1980 but not seen again until 13 September 1980 after which single birds were noted frequently.

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CORRIGENDUM

Unfortunately, a typographical error in H.D.V. Prendergast's address was recorded incorrectly in the December 1984 issue, p.76. It should read: MR. H.D.V. PRENDERGAST, 17/25 Mackennal Street, Lyneham, A.C.T. 2602.

MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

4. The bird is clearly a Non-passerine and obviously belongs to the Heron family (ARDEIDAE.) Moreover, streaking on the breast and spotting on the back rules out the possibility of it being an adult. Since juvenile Brown Bittern *Botaurus poiciloptilis* Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* and Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* do not have spots on the wing coverts, we are left with the possibility of Striated Heron *Butorides striatus* or Rufous Night Heron *Nycticorax caledonicus*. A Striated Heron in this plumage shows buff brown underparts, indistinct streaking on the breast and small buff spots on the wing coverts.



This bird is indeed a Rufous Night Heron. Strong contrasting streaks on the head, neck, mantle and breast; the whitish belly and undertail coverts and large white strongly contrasting spots on the scapulars and wing coverts are diagnostic features.

The photograph was taken by me in April 1984 at the Diamantina River crossing, Birdsville. At the time about 200 individuals of all ages were feeding in the river.

TONY PALLISER

Mystery Photograph 5. Identify the species. Answer next issue.

