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THE SUNBIRD

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BIRDS IN THE VICINITY OF EDWARD RIVER SETTLEMENT

PART II. DISCUSSION, REFERENCES, LIST OF PASSERINES

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ABSTRACT

Edward River Settlement is at the western edge of the Cape York Peninsula faunal region with an attenuated vine forest avifauna on shell grit dunes close to the coast and a slightly depauperate woodland community. Western birds were found most frequently in the grassland associated with tidal salt flats. From 1974 to 1983 we recorded 239 species in the vicinity of Edward River settlement and a further 8 have been reported from the region by other workers. A complete annotated list has been divided into the non-passerines (Garnett and Bredl 1985) and the passerines, which have been appended to part II. The avifauna of each major habitat, observations of migration and the effects of humans are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In Part I of this paper the ornithological history of the Edward River Region was summarised and the main habitats described. An annotated list of the non-passerines was provided. In Part II the avifaunas of each habitat are considered with regard to their faunal affinities and origins. Observations on overt migration and the various ways in which people are currently affecting the birds of the area are also discussed. The second part of the annotated list, the passerines, is given in the appendix.

DISCUSSION

Water Birds

The freshwater swamps that form during the wet season at Edward River were a major habitat for herons, waterfowl and migratory waders. Late in the wet season many hundreds of herons, egrets, ibises and spoonbills commuted daily from the heronries on the Mitchell River delta (Garnett 1985) and could be seen flying north each morning and south each evening. These birds continued to use the swamps as they dried out and many individuals remained throughout the year. This was not true of the waterfowl, which congregated briefly in large numbers late in the wet season but were almost all gone by the end of April. The west coast of the Peninsula is thought to be a migratory pathway for ducks and geese (Lavery 1966) and probably also constitutes an important breeding area.

The freshwater swamps were also used extensively by migratory waders. As the water level receded from the mid-wet season peak, a richly productive rim of mud was exposed for foraging by many thousands of wading birds. The late wet season swamps beside the Gulf of Carpentaria probably represent an important refuelling point for the Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and to a lesser extent Red-necked Stint and Curlew Sandpiper, that migrate north during March and April from southern Victoria.

Another feature of these ephemeral wetlands was the rails. Several of our observations represent range extensions of many kilometres. The appearance of White-browed Crake, Spotless Crake and Buff-banded Rail at Edward River, in the Torres Strait (Draffan *et al.* 1983) and on the wetlands near Karumba (pers.obs.) demonstrates that the cryptic members of this family disperse far more widely than is commonly realised and that regular migration along the wetlands of the peninsula is quite possible.

The other major waterbird habitat was the tidal mud. Aerial surveys of the Gulf shore, which will be summarised in a later paper, show that the Chapman River is a boundary for the distribution of shore-frequenting migratory waders. North of the Chapman the beaches are largely sandy and only small numbers of birds congregate around river mouths. The

Chapman River represents the northern limit of the silt brought down by the Mitchell and Coleman Rivers which extends thickly from the mangrove fringe at low tide. Two of the more interesting and abundant waders near the settlement, the Black-tailed Godwit and the Great Knot, are also major elements in the vast wader population that winter in the south of the Gulf.

The mudflats were also the habitat of almost the entire local population of Radjah Shelduck during the dry season. Other waterfowl moved there only one month before the wet season when all disperse inland to the refilled swamps.

Dune Woodland

The distributions of thirteen bird species in the strip of dune woodland north of the Maliman River extend no further south along the Gulf coast (Blakers *et al.* 1984). These species are the Orange-footed Scrubfowl, Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove, Palm Cockatoo, Varied Triller, White-browed Robin, Variegated Fairy-wren (race *amabilis*), Large-billed and Fairy Gerygones, Graceful, Yellow-spotted, Tawny-breasted and Dusky Honeyeaters and the Red-browed Firetail. Such a cutoff is sufficiently sharp to mark the edge of the faunal boundary between eastern and western birds postulated by Kikkawa and Pearse (1969). Although rainforest bird diversity certainly attenuates southward along the coast from Weipa, the bird community in the dune woodland at Edward River settlement differs less from that in other Cape York Peninsula rainforest habitats than the community described by Kikkawa *et al.* (1981) in low riverine vine forest at Kowanyama only 70 km to the south.

Since the oldest of the shell dunes is only 5990 \pm 100 years (Rhodes 1979), and climate before the rise in sea level was much drier than it is today (Nix and Kalma 1972), both the dune woodland and its avifauna must be relatively young. The pocket of dune woodland in which the Tawny-breasted Honeyeaters were found may be an island of restricted suitable habitat within the dune woodland as a whole or these birds may be a remnant of a more extensive population that has dwindled as the environment has changed. The brief appearance of a Palm Cockatoo indicates that this rainforest-associated species sometimes disperses beyond its usual range. It is possible that the perched aquifers beneath the shell grit dunes, which provide fresh water

throughout the long and severe dry season, have allowed the dune woodland and many of its associated birds to advance into an area otherwise too arid.

Woodland Birds

Although some elements of the Gulf woodland avifauna, such as the Pictorella Mannikin, are present, the birds of the woodlands east of Edward River settlement reflect those of central Cape York Peninsula more than areas immediately to the south. Five species, the Common Bronzewing, Crested Pigeon, Cockatiel, Apostlebird and Masked Woodswallow, have distributions that extend to within 100 km of Edward River Settlement from the arid zone but no further. On the other hand the Red-backed Button-quail and the Black-backed Butcherbird are typical components of the Cape York Peninsula woodland avifauna. Therefore this habitat would also lie within the eastern province of Kikkawa and Pearse (1969).

Possibly because much of the woodland is fairly low with a poor diversity of eucalypts, a number of species that might be expected appear to avoid the area altogether although found to both the north and south. Grey Shrike-thrush, Brown Tree-creeper, Silver-crowned and Noisy Friarbirds, White-streaked and Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters and Pied Butcherbird were all searched for but never found. Although there is a record of the Black-chinned Honeyeater from the area (Blakers *et al.* 1984), that species must also be very scarce.

Mangrove Birds

The discovery of a small, apparently isolated population of White-breasted Whistlers between the Maliman and Chapman Rivers illustrates well how little is known of the birds occupying mangroves on the west coast of the Peninsula. From the distribution of mangrove birds, Schodde *et al.* (1982) concluded that there has previously been a broad gap in mangrove distributions in the mid-west coast of Cape York Peninsula. They have been careful not to define the locality of the gap exactly but it is likely that the settlement would fall within the area they mention. Therefore the mangrove patches that now grow beside rivers along this coast are probably as recent as the dune woodland. To a far greater extent than the woodlands, however, the mangroves are analogous to islands, as is reflected

by their resident birds. While not exactly the same, the patchiness of some bird's distributions here show a strong resemblance to the patterns of bird distribution on Torres Strait islands (Draffan *et al.* 1983). No member of the *Colluricincla* / *Pachycephala* complex of species ever coexisted in the same area as mangroves. The Little Shrike-thrushes along the Chapman River never shared the peripheral *Avicennia* with Rufous Whistlers, while neither cohabited with the White-breasted Whistler. In view of its colonising abilities in the Torres Strait, it is surprising that Mangrove Golden Whistler was confined to the, most extensive, area of mangroves at the mouth of the Mitchell River. Shining Flycatchers, Rufous Fantails and the mangrove inhabiting form of the Grey Fantail showed a similar mutually exclusive distribution. This island effect has possibly maintained the west coast gap in bird distributions despite the contemporary chain of mangroves. Although differences in mangrove forest type must be important, I would tentatively suggest that the presence of one member of a mutually exclusive set of birds in a mangrove island inhibits others of that set expanding their range across the gap. White-breasted Whistlers and the mangrove inhabiting forms of the Grey and Rufous Fantails would be examples of this phenomenon.

Migration

Migration of birds along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula is a much more complex process than can be unravelled by casual observations. However the observations made on two particular days may be useful in future discussion of the subject. On the 9 September 1980, Dollarbirds, Pallid and Channel-billed Cuckoos and Common Koels were all seen or heard for the first time since April or May. This suggests that some, presumably meteorological, event had triggered the migration of all four species simultaneously (and that all had travelled at the same speed). It is interesting that Thomson (1935) noted the sudden simultaneous arrival of Dollarbirds at two locations near Edward River on 25 October, 1928.

The second notable day, 1 May 1980, was more puzzling. On this day Brown Falcons, Australian Kestrels, Welcome Swallows, Tree and Fairy Martins, Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and Spangled Drongos were all seen flying *south* in large numbers. No equivalent return movement of any of the seven species was

ever seen. It is tempting to believe that the birds had made the same mistake as some American pilots during the Second World War. Along the west coast of Cape York Peninsula, including the Edward River settlement, are the remains of several Mitchell bombers that crash-landed having run out of fuel. Travelling north from Townsville, the pilots failed to detect the airfield near the tip of the Cape at which they were to cease keeping the coast on their left, and continued on oblivious of their change in direction. Rather than a mistake however it may be to the birds' advantage to follow the coast, and perhaps a more reliable source of food, than to risk a direct flight across the dry inland. Unfortunately this theory is not supported by observations of the Rainbow Bee-eater, whose mass movement south along the coast in March was accompanied by an equally large northerly movement further inland. Such large scale movements of other species inland, especially if on a broad front, could easily have occurred undetected.

Effects of Humans

Hunting, introduction of plants and animals, and burning are the effects of people most likely to be detrimental to the birds of the Edward River area. The apparent decline of the Emu and the local scarcity of Bustard have already been noted. Although possibly a local effect, hunting is popular among all sectors of the Edward River community. Any increase or greater dispersion of people across the west coast of Cape York Peninsula could eventually pose a threat to the more edible or useful species.

A far more serious threat, however, is that of weed infestation. Three major pests from further south, Rubber Vine *Cryptostegia grandiflora*, Calotrope *Calotropis procera* and Noogoora Burr *Xanthium pungens*, have already crossed the Coleman River and there is no obvious obstacle to, or attempt to control, their continued progress. The effects of these weeds on the structure and diversity of the grass/sedgeland and the dune woodland can only be detrimental. Although the Australian Brush-turkey has been able to adapt to the Rubber Vine thickets further south, species with more exacting requirements will almost certainly suffer.

Feral pigs *Sus scrofa* and cattle *Bos taurus/indicus* have been in the area for so long that it is hard to believe they can do further damage. North of the settlement no cattle have been must-

ered for over eighteen years but the country is not obviously different from areas to the south from which cattle are removed regularly. The most obvious effect of pigs is around the *Eleocharis* swamps but, far from diminishing, these swamps apparently expand into previously bare saltpan after disturbance by pigs.

A more positive effect of human habitation is the presence beside the settlement of a singularly effective reserve for waterbirds as well as many other species. The freshwater enclosure within the 20 ha breeding lagoon of the Edward River crocodile farm has, at one time or another, attracted nearly every species of dune woodland, grassland or water bird. It is around this lagoon that the important population of Star Finch is centred. Since the grass in the breeding lagoon is never burnt, the apparent absence of Star Finches elsewhere in the area may be an indication that burning regimes have changed in recent times despite the endemic nature of fire on the west coast of Cape York Peninsula.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF PASSERINE BIRDS

- Singing Bushlark** *Mirafra javanica*. Seen infrequently in grassland.
- Welcome Swallow** *Hirundo neoxena*. First seen early April and thereafter common around settlement until late August. On 1st May 1980 many hundreds were seen flying south in a band 4+km wide.
- Tree Martin** *Cecropis nigricans*. Common in small flocks during March and April but not seen during the remainder of the year. On 10 April and 1 May 1980 many hundreds were seen flying south.
- Fairy Martin** *Cecropis ariel*. Small flocks often active in the evening over open *Melaleuca* woodland and salt pans. Several hundred were seen moving south on 26 April and 1 May 1980.
- Richard's Pipit** *Anthus novaeseelandiae*. Common on the grassy fringes of salt pans.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae*. Large flocks of 50+ moving south along coastal dunes 1 May 1980. Flocks of 20+ common in dune woodland until October.

White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina papuensis*. Common in tall eucalypt woodland and dune woodland throughout the year.

Cicada Bird *Coracina tenuirostris*. A male in mangroves 31st March and a female in *Melaleuca* woodland on 28th September 1980.

White-winged Triller *Lalage sueurii*. Abundant in open *Melaleuca* woodland from April to August, flocks frequently associated with those of Australian Magpie-larks. All birds in brown plumage until September by which time they were seen rarely.

Varied Triller *Lalage leucomela*. Common resident of dune woodland.

Mangrove Robin *Eopsaltria pulverulenta*. Resident in broad belt of *Avicennia* woodland on gently shelving coastal muds 4km south of Chapman River. Seen in no other mangroves.

Lemon-bellied Flycatcher *Microeca flavigaster*. Sparsely distributed through woodland, particularly the *Melaleuca* woodland in swales between dune woodlands.

Jacky Winter *Microeca leucophaea*. Scarce in open *Melaleuca* woodland.

White-browed Robin *Poecilodryas superciliosa*. Inconspicuous resident near damper areas of dune woodland.

Mangrove Golden Whistler *Pachycephala melanura*. A single female seen in mangroves of the Mitchell River delta. Absent from mangroves in the vicinity of the Chapman, Munkun and Maliman Rivers.

Rufous Whistler *Pachycephala rufiventris*. Common in all wooded habitats including *Petalostigma* associated with salt pans and *Avicennia* dominated thickets lining upper estuarine channels.

White-breasted Whistler *Pachycephala lanioides*. Resident in the same patch of *Avicennia* 4km south of the Chapman River as the Mangrove Robin. Present from March to October 1980 and still there October 1983.

Little Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla megathyncha*. Resident in dense mangroves *Bruguiera*, *Rhizophora* and *Xylocarpus* - along lower reaches of Chapman and Munkun rivers.

Broad-billed Flycatcher *Myiagra ruficollis*. Common in most mangrove forests.

Leaden Flycatcher *Myiagra rubecula*. Common in all wooded communities apart from mangroves.

Shining Flycatcher *Myiagra alecto*. Present in mangroves of Mitchell River delta but absent from those of the Maliman, Chapman and Munkun rivers.

Restless Flycatcher *Myiagra inquieta*. Sparsely distributed in woodland habitats including coastal *Casuarina*.

Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*. Apparently resident in mangroves near river mouths. Nesting during wet season.

Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa*. Common in woodland habitats between late April and August 1980. Race *phasiana* abundant in the patch of *Avicennia* 4km south of the Chapman River with Mangrove Robins and White-breasted Whistlers. Adults feeding newly fledged young October 1983.

Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*. Common in open *Melaleuca* woodland and *Petalostigma* associated with salt pans from March to October 1980.

Grey-crowned Babbler *Pomatostomus temporalis*. Common in *Melaleuca* woodland on the eastern fringes of the region. Not seen near the coast.

Clamorous Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*. Seen during March and May 1980 in long grass beside a freshwater lagoon.

Tawny Grassbird *Megalurus timoriensis*. Common in long grass between the dunes closest to the sea. Not seen elsewhere. Particularly vocal in June and July.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*. Uncommon in grass/sedge land around salt pans, often with Golden-headed Cisticola. Not seen after July by which time most of the grass had been burnt. A nest containing three eggs found January 1979.

Golden-headed Cisticola *Cisticola exilis*. Numerous in all areas of long grass, increasingly confined to that between the most coastal dunes as the dry season progressed.

Rufous Songlark *Cincloramphus mathewsi*. Between May and September 1980 flocks of 25+ birds common in open *Melaleuca* woodland. Apparently absent at other times of the year.

Variiegated Fairy-wren *Malurus lamberti*. Common in dune woodland as far south as Maliman River.

Red-backed Fairy-wren *Malurus melanocephalus*. Parties seen in most woodland communities having a well-grassed understorey. No coloured males seen between late May and early September.

Weebill *Smicronis brevirostris*. Common in *Melaleuca* woodland at the eastern fringe of area visited. Not seen within 10km of settlement.

Large-billed Gerygone *Gerygone magnirostris*. Seen only three times, and once netted, in dense *Melaleuca* along freshwater reaches of Edward, Chapman and Maliman rivers. Nest and eggs collected by Thomson (1935) on 28 October.

Mangrove Gerygone *Gerygone laevigaster*. Common in all taller mangrove forests, feeding from canopy to ground levels.

Fairy Gerygone *Gerygone palpebrosa*. Common in dune woodland, feeding flocks often associated with Yellow White-eyes.

White-throated Gerygone *Gerygone olivacea*. Several pairs and individuals seen in tall eucalypt and *Melaleuca* woodland during June 1980. Not otherwise recorded.

Varied Sitella *Daphoenositta chrysoptera*. A single party of 12 encountered in open *Melaleuca* woodland in June 1980.

Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*. Common in eucalypt and open *Melaleuca* woodland throughout the year. Despite searching no other members of this genus were seen.

Blue-faced Honeyeater *Entomyzon cyanotis*. Parties encountered frequently in all wooded habitats excluding mangroves.

Tawny-breasted Honeyeater *Xanthotis flaviventer*. Seen in only a single patch of particularly dense dune woodland immediately north of the Maliman River. The patch of woodland measured only 400 x 200m. However it was collected from the lower Edward River in 1928 (Thomson 1935).

Yellow-spotted Honeyeater *Meliphaga notata*. Common in dune woodland. Several netted and measured for positive identification since large birds with heavy bills were seen to give the chip call characteristic of the Graceful Honeyeater.

Graceful Honeyeater *Meliphaga gracilis*. Also common in dune woodland where a few were netted. The ratio of the two *Meliphaga* species in the area are not known but it appears that, contrary to Thomson (1935), Yellow-spotted Honeyeaters overlap the range of Graceful Honeyeaters here as they do elsewhere in Queensland.

White-gaped Honeyeater *Lichenostomus unicolor*. Uncommon resident of dune woodland and the denser mangroves associated with river mouths.

Yellow Honeyeater *Lichenostomus flavus*. Common in dune woodland and in denser creek side vegetation in *Melaleuca* woodland.

White-throated Honeyeater *Melithreptus albogularis*. Common in the upper strata of all wooded habitats excluding mangroves.

Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta*. Abundant in *Melaleuca* woodland, particularly near creeks. Occasionally seen on the fringes of dune woodland.

Bar-breasted Honeyeater *Ramsayornis fasciatus*. Seen infrequently in flowering *Melaleuca* spp. or *Aegiceras corniculatum* along creeks. Host to Brush Cuckoo.

Rufous-banded Honeyeater *Conopophila albogularis*. Common on mangrove fringes and nearby woodland. Not seen in dune woodland. Feeding newly fledged young March 1980. Less evident from June to September.

Rufous-throated Honeyeater *Conopophila rufogularis*. Individuals and small parties seen infrequently in *Melaleuca* spp. near creeks.

Banded Honeyeater *Certhionyx pectoralis*. Seen rarely in open *Melaleuca* woodland between June and August but suddenly present in hundreds when *Melaleuca stenostachya* bloomed in late September 1980.

Dusky Honeyeater *Myzomela obscura*. Uncommon resident of dune woodland.

Red-headed Honeyeater *Myzomela erythrocephala*. Common in mangroves beside river mouths, in denser dune woodland and, rarely, in coastal *Casuarina*.

Yellow-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*. Common in dune woodland and adjacent mangroves and woodland. Breeding noticed October, December and March.

Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*. Common in all wooded communities besides mangroves.

Red-browed Pardalote *Pardalotus rubricatus*. Uncommon in eucalypt and *Melaleuca* woodland. Nest found in June 1980.

Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*. Common in *Melaleuca* woodland on eastern fringe of area studied. Not seen within 10km of Edward River settlement.

Yellow White-eye *Zosterops lutea*. Small parties seen frequently in dune woodland and mangroves near river mouths. Often associated with Fairy Gerygones.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. A few individuals were present in the settlement for several weeks during the 1978 dry season.

Red-browed Firetail *Emblema temporalis*. Flocks common in grassy glades within dune woodland.

Star Finch *Neochmia ruficauda*. Several hundred present between the settlement and the sea. Seen nowhere else in the area. From March to June in small parties feeding on tall *Heteropogon* and other grasses with large seeds. From July until October a single large flock roosted in a patch of dense *Typha* sp. and fed on remaining tall grasses and on burnt areas.

Crimson Finch *Neochmia phaeton*. Small parties in long damp grass on the fringes of *Pandanus* and *Melaleuca* swamps and around settlement.

Double-barred Finch *Poephila bichenovii*. Common in most woodland communities. Flocks of 50+ birds seen at all times of year. Nests found from March to May.

Masked Finch *Poephila personata*. Common in open *Melaleuca* woodland. Never seen in eucalypt woodland or dune woodland.

Black-throated Finch *Poephila cincta*. Small parties in all woodland types, particularly between dune woodlands. Nest with young found in early May 1980.

Pictorella Mannikin *Lonchura pectoralis*. Two flocks of about 20 birds seen in the most open areas of *Melaleuca* woodland, once in association with Chestnut-breasted Mannikins.

Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax*. Small parties seen rarely in the more grassy areas of dune woodland and, once, in open *Melaleuca* woodland. Often a minor element in flocks of other finch species.

Yellow Oriole *Oriolus flavocinctus*. Individuals seen and, more frequently, heard in dune woodland throughout the year. Unfledged nestling found mid-March 1980.

Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus*. Several seen in dune woodland between late July and October feeding on ripe fruit.

Figbird *Sphecotheres viridis*. Flocks common in dune woodland throughout the year.

Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*. Small numbers present in most wooded areas throughout the year. On 1 May 1980 20+ individuals were seen flying south along coastal dunes with Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes.

Great Bowerbird *Chlamydera nuchalis*. Common in all wooded habitats, bowers found frequently. Decorations usually included white shells and sometimes angular sections of dried salt pan mud.

Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*. Flocks of 15-20 birds appeared suddenly on 6 May 1980 and remained common along water courses and damp areas between dunes until September. Frequently associated with flocks of White-winged Trillers.

White-breasted Woodswallow *Artamus leucorhynchus*. Seen once over drying salt flats 12 July 1980.

Black-faced Woodswallow *Artamus cinereus*. Small parties encountered occasionally in open *Melaleuca* woodland between June and October.

Little Woodswallow *Artamus minor*. Small parties over coastal *Casuarina* and open *Melaleuca* woodland throughout the year.

Black Butcherbird *Cracticus quoyi*. Seen once and netted once in mangroves along Chapman River. Not encountered elsewhere.

Black-backed Butcherbird *Cracticus mentalis*. Individuals seen frequently in eucalypt and *Melaleuca* woodland.

Australian Magpie *Gymnorhina tibicen*. Seen once in June and once in September in open *Melaleuca* woodland.

Torresian Crow *Corvus orru*. Flocks common both around the settlement and in all woodland habitats.

THE WHITE-WINGED TERN *Chlidonias leucoptera*
IN SOUTH-WESTERN QUEENSLAND, DIAMANTINA SHIRE

R.G. ATHERTON, D.S. REIMER, T.J. PULSFORD
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The White-winged Tern is a regular migratory visitor to estuaries and swamps of coastal Australia. It has been recorded at Thargomindah in western Queensland, but is considered rare and irregular in these arid regions (Pizzey 1980). Recently this bird was recorded in south-western Queensland during the Diamantina Fauna Survey, conducted by the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service.

On 19 April 1984, forty individuals were observed 50 kilometres west of Betoota (25° 40' S, 140° 15' E; Alt. 60 metres). The Terns were feeding over and resting on the banks and mud flats of the main channel of the Diamantina River (Land Unit 76 of the C1 Land System. Wilson *et al.*, in press). This channel was flowing after recent rain, and is surrounded by alluvial plains of deep grey cracking clay with grasslands and lignum *Meuhlenbeckia cunninghamii* thickets, and has a fringing woodland of coolibah *Eucalyptus microtheca* on the river margins. Of these birds, 20 were in black and white breeding plumage, 10 in a transitional mottled black and white plumage and 10 in non-breeding plumage. One specimen was collected, see appendix. Although we remained at this site until 25 April 1984, only one other group was observed, on 22 April. This had forty-seven individuals; with 15 in breeding, 12 in transitional and 20 in non-breeding plumage. Some were possibly members of the original group.

In the same habitat at this site, we observed Pacific Heron *Ardea pacifica*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica*, Straw-necked Ibis *Threskiornis spinicollis*, Yellow-billed Spoonbill *Platalea flavipes*, Masked Lapwing *Vanellus miles*, Red-kneed Dotterel *Erythrogonys cinctus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Red-necked Avocet *Recurvirostra novaehollandiae*, Silver Gull *Larus novaehollandiae*, and Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nitotica*.

APPENDIX

SPECIMEN DETAILS

National Parks and Wildlife Service number N18819. Queensland Museum number 022668. Total length 235mm, bill length 25.5mm, tail length 80.0mm, tarsus length 26.0mm. Sex could not be determined. Plumage: Breeding - black head and body, white wings and tail feathers.

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DRONGOS PURSUE MICROCHIROPTERA

MICHAEL STRONG AND EDITH CUFFE

On 27 September 1984 at Caboolture, south-east Queensland, 27° 04' 30", 153° 01' 15", the behaviour of Spangled Drongos *Dicrurus hottentottus* caught our attention. At 1230 hours while birdwatching in open forest we heard a cacophony of calls emanating from an area of thick bush. Investigation revealed three or four Drongos chasing, and in one instance possibly killing, small brown bats (*Microchiroptera*). It was a warm bright day and the dozen or so bats were confusedly searching for shelter under loose bark and in hollow spouts. The cause of the bats diurnal activity was unknown.

One bat was knocked down and followed into the undergrowth by a Drongo but could not be located by us. The bats eventually found refuge under the loose bark of a nearby bloodwood.

There are two unpublished accounts of flesh-eating by Drongos from south-eastern Queensland. In the Conondales a Yellow-faced Honeyeater *Lichenostomus chrysops* was pursued and caught by a Drongo (pers comm. C. Corben, A. Smyth and W. Horton). In the other incident, a House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* was caught and killed (pers comm. G.J. Ingram). On each occasion the prey was eaten by the Drongos.

A literature reference to Drongos (usually considered insectivores) taking flesh is erroneous. Blakers *et al* (1984: p.613) refer to the possible flesh-eating by Drongos, "[the Drongo] robs food from, and eats other birds" but the reference given (Bell, 1967) refers not to the Drongo but to the Helmeted Friarbird *Phileton buceroides* (prev. *novae-guinae*). Under 'Parasitism by the Drongo', Bell states (p.97) "*P. novae-guinea* attack quite large birds, and kill at least one". The Drongo in the narrative was only mentioned as a robber of other birds' food.

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- MICHAEL STRONG and EDITH CUFFE, *St. Michael's, Old Toorbul Point Road, Caboolture. Qld. 4510.*

MYSTERY PHOTOGRAPHS

5. The stark contrast between clean white crown and rather uniform, blackish body-plumage immediately suggests White-capped Noddy *Anous minutus*, a view strengthened by dumpy, front-heavy, body-form and tree-perching, not typical features of the larger, paler-bodied Common Noddy *A. stolidus*. The bill, however, looks absurdly short for either



White-capped or Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris* and would fit Common well if it was not so fine, and straight along the culmen. More concrete evidence against Common is provided by the short tail, not extending noticeably beyond the wing tips, and the sharp contrast between hind crown and nape. This latter feature also explains the short bill as it is a sign of immaturity in White-capped Noddies and young terns generally show much shorter and/or weaker bills than adults.

Most Lesser Noddies have pale lores but have them black as in Mystery Photograph No. 5. Such birds closely resemble White-capped Noddies but have paler, browner bodies and greyer crowns so lie between Common and White-capped in general colouration. In addition, Lesser probably never shows the contrast between crown and nape which is so typical of immature White-caps. This White-capped Noddy was photographed on Heron Island by Anita Smyth in July, 1983.

CHRIS CORBEN

Mystery Photograph 6. Identify the species. Answer next issue.

