

THE SUNBIRD

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BIRDS OF FAIRFAX ISLAND (BUNKER GROUP)
AND WRECK ISLAND (CAPRICORN GROUP), GREAT BARRIER REEF

by Julie Booth*

Fairfax Island (23°50'S 152°20'E), a coral island consisting of three parts, lies about 3 miles northwest of Lady Musgrave Island and about 35 miles northeast of Round Hill Head of the continental shore. About 17 acres in area, the island contains a variety of nesting habitats, from a sand bank frequently washed away, to vegetation of various heights. MacGillivray (1928) reported the breeding of the Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Brown Gannet, Crested Tern, White-capped Noddy, Sooty Oyster-catcher and the Reef Heron on and island and Wheeler & Watson (1963) listed the island as one of the breeding grounds of the Silver Gull. The breeding colony of Brown Gannets has also been commented on by Nebe (1932) and Gillett & McNeill (1959). The species reported here were noted during my stay between January 1966 and May 1970.

Wreck Island (23°18', 151°58') lies about 8 miles north-northeast of Heron Island and is about 15 acres in area. It is covered with vegetation; between the tall stand of Pisonia on the sheltered end and the stand of Casuarina on the exposed end, the central part and the fringe of the island have shrubs and small trees of Pandanus and a few figs. Cooper (1948) on his visit to the island in December 1946 recorded the Black-naped Tern, Crested Tern, Lesser Crested Tern, Turnstone, Sooty

*Communicated by Jiro Kikkawa and Robin Elks.

Oyster-catcher, Reef Heron, Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Bar-shouldered Dove, White-breasted Sea-Eagle, and Little Pied Cormorant. Nebe (1932) noted 4 White-breasted Sea-Eagles and a small colony of Black-naped Terns. My observations of birds on this island have been continuous since May 1970.

Wandering Albatross Diomedea exulans and Giant Petrel Macronectes giganteus appeared on Fairfax in November 1969 while a juvenile Fairy Prion Pachyptila turtur was washed up on the beach on Wreck in September 1970 (specimen sent to CSIRO). These are sea birds of the southern ocean and not normally expected over the Great Barrier Reef. Wedge-tailed Shearwater Puffinus pacificus breeds on both islands but the number on Fairfax is very small. In 1970 about 500 shearwaters arrived on Wreck on October 18, but this arrival time may be later than in normal years since they arrived at Heron on October 14 which is about a week later than usual.

One pair of Red-tailed Tropic-Birds Phaethon rubricauda appeared over Fairfax on April 13, 1968 and another rare visitor, the Red-footed Gannet Sula sula, was also recorded at Fairfax. Two immature Sula sula were banded on January 30, 1967. There are breeding colonies of the Brown Gannet Sula leucogaster on Fairfax and their nesting occurred in October in 1966, 1967 and 1968, and in August in 1969. The young were fully fledged in 4 months. This species occasionally appeared also at Wreck but there is no breeding colony there. Little Pied Cormorants Phalacrocorax melanoleucos were often seen on Wreck, their numbers fluctuating up to 40 birds. Both Lesser and Greater Frigate-Birds (Fregata ariel and F. minor) occurred on Fairfax (on one occasion the number reached 84) and the

latter seemed to be more common than the former there, though only the Lesser has been sighted over Wreck so far.

The Reef Heron Egretta sacra breeds on both islands, with a population size of 80-100 consisting of more white phase birds than dark phase birds. As stragglers, the White-faced Heron Ardea novaehollandiae appeared on both islands and the White Egret Egretta alba (?) came to Fairfax on Good Friday 1969. Other water birds straggling to Fairfax included an Eastern Swamphen Porphyrio porphyrio (staying for 6 weeks from January 1, 1968), a White Ibis Threskiornis molucca (June 4, 1968), and a Lotus Bird Irediparra gallinacea with its left leg missing below the knee (April 21, 1969). A Beach Stone Curlew Esacus magnirostris also appeared on Fairfax in 1968.

Waders noted at the time of Robin Elks' visit in January 1967 were Terek Sandpiper Tringa cinerea, Eastern Curlew Numenius madagascariensis, Grey-tailed Tattler Tringa brevipes, Sanderling Calidris albus, Golden Plover Pluvialis dominica, and Turnstone Arenaria interpres. Some waders stayed on the island throughout the year. The Sanderling was sighted again in May 1969. On Wreck, Jiro Kikkawa noted some 22 Turnstones, 12 Golden Plovers, and 4 Grey-tailed Tattlers on October 22, 1970. Both Pied and Sooty Oyster-catchers (Haematopus ostralegus and H. unicolor) bred on Fairfax from September-October while only the latter was seen to breed on Wreck, though both have been recorded.

Silver Gulls Larus novaehollandiae breed on both islands, nesting in October. On Wreck their young were noted as late as May 1970. Their breeding ground was

shared by concurrent nesting terns; on Fairfax the Crested Tern Sterna bergii and Lesser Crested Tern Sterna bengalensis, and on Wreck the Bridled Tern Sterna anaethetus, bred in the same area. The Bridled Tern also bred on Fairfax, but their colony was located among the Brown Gannets'. The Little Tern Sterna albifrons and the Black-naped Tern Sterna sumatrana also bred on Fairfax but their colonies were away from other species. The latter species were found to nest both in November-December and in April. Both species also occur on Wreck without breeding. The Roseate Tern Sterna dougalli nested on the spit and the White-capped Noddy Anous minutus in trees on Fairfax, but neither of them has been seen on Wreck so far.

Two pairs of White-breasted Sea-Eagles once nested on Fairfax and three large nests were found on Wreck, but some birds seem to have been shot by casual visitors and the birds disappeared from both islands.

The only breeding land bird on Fairfax was the Sacred Kingfisher Halcyon sancta. The Bar-shouldered Dove Geopelia humeralis, Banded Land Rail Rallus philippensis and Silvereye Zosterops lateralis which breed in small numbers on Wreck did not breed on Fairfax though Silvereyes occasionally visited the island. There are about 30 Silvereyes, some of which were beginning to nest at the end of October (1970). Three of them had been banded on Heron by Kikkawa (1970) and this represented less than 1% of the surviving banded population. The Sacred Kingfisher also breeds on Wreck.

Fairfax Island received many species of continental land birds including the Rainbow Lorikeet Trichoglossus

haematodus (at least 18 washed up on the beach), Boobook Owl Ninox novaeseelandiae, Barn Owl Tyto alba, Nankeen Kestrel Falco cenchroides (May 18, 1969), a falcon (Falco longipennis?), a bronze-cuckoo (Chrysococcyx lucidus? September 1969), Forest Kingfisher Halcyon macleayii (September 1969), Eastern Broad-billed Roller Eurystomus orientalis (February 27, 1968), Fairy Martin (?) Petrochelidon ariel (May-June 1969), Welcome Swallow (?) Hirundo tahitica (about 30 in March 1969), Varied Triller (?) Lalage leucomela, Leaden Flycatcher Myiagra rubecula, a fantail (Rhipidura sp.), Restless Flycatcher (?) Seisura inquieta (March 1969), Rufous Whistler Pachycephala rufiventris (April 22, 1969), a honeyeater (Lichmera indistincta?), Olive-backed Oriole Oriolus sagittatus, Southern Figbird (?) Sphecotheres vieilloti (March 1970), and White-breasted Wood-Swallow Artamus leucorhynchus (March 1969).

Wreck Island also received a falcon (July-August 1970), a Rufous Whistler, and 15 Eastern Broad-billed Rollers (September 1970). One individual of the last species was still present on October 22, 1970, when Kikkawa observed two pairs of Magpie Lark Grallina cyanoleuca and a Barred Cuckoo-Shrike Coracina lineata also on the island.

Many rats live on both islands and predation by rats on eggs and young of many species is expected to be high. Lady Musgrave Island, which contains many breeding populations of terns, herons, shearwaters, gulls, Banded Land Rails, Bar-shouldered Doves, silvereyes, is said to be devoid of rats. However, much of the undergrowth had been cleared by goats on this island.

The absence of White-capped Noddies from Wreck and Bar-shouldered Dove and Banded Land Rail from Fairfax is interesting. Factors governing the distribution of breeding populations of many species on Barrier Reef islands may be complex involving traditional breeding sites and interactions among species as well as colonization and re-colonization from island to island.

I have banded the following species since 1963 for the CSIRO Bird Banding Scheme.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus pacificus*)

Heron Is.	1963/64	1064 adults
Heron Is.	1964/65	27 adults and 38 young

Black-winged Petrel (*Pterodroma hypoleuca*)

Heron Is.	1963/64	5 birds
Heron Is.	1964/65	3 birds

These birds may be breeding on the island.

Cape Petrel (*Daption capensis*)

Heron Is.	July 1965	1 adult
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This bird not recorded by Kikkawa (1970).

Little Pied Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*)

Fairfax Is.	Jan. 1967	2 young
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Brown Gannet (*Sula leucogaster*)

Fairfax Is.	1966	43 young
Fairfax Is.	1966/67	6 adults and 422 young
Fairfax Is.	1968	35 young
Fairfax Is.	1969	119 young

<u>Red-footed Gannet (Sula sula)</u>		
Fairfax Is.	Jan. 1967	2 immature birds
<u>Black-naped Tern (Sterna sumatrana)</u>		
Heron Is.	1964	1 adult and 40 young
<u>White-capped Noddy (Anous minutus)</u>		
	1963/64	20 adults and 76 young
	1964	5 young
<u>Silver Gull (Larus novaehollandiae)</u>		
Heron Is.	1964	2 adults and 5 young
<u>Golden Plover (Pluvialis dominica)</u>		
Heron Is.	1963	2 adults
<u>White-faced Heron (Ardea novaehollandiae)</u>		
Heron Is.	1964	1 adult
<u>Reef Heron (Egretta sacra)</u>		
Heron Is.	1963	3 adults and 6 young
Heron Is.	1964	4 adults and 25 young
Heron Is.	1965	9 adults and 11 young
Heron Is.	1966	3 adults and 3 young
<u>Sacred Kingfisher (Halcyon sancta)</u>		
Heron Is.	1965	2 adults
<u>Little Friar Bird (Philemon citreogularis)</u>		
Heron Is.	March 1964	1 adult
One Little Quail (<u>Turnix velox</u>) was recorded from Heron Island. This bird was sketched in colour and identified by Mr. W. Hitchcock from the sketch.		

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Since receipt of the foregoing, Julie Booth has advised that she has sighted on Wreck Island a Green Catbird Ailuroeous crassirostris during September-October 1970, and a female Koel Eudynamys scolopacea feeding on Ficus opposita fruits, on November 4, 1970.

Editor.

STRIATED GRASS-WREN IN QUEENSLAND

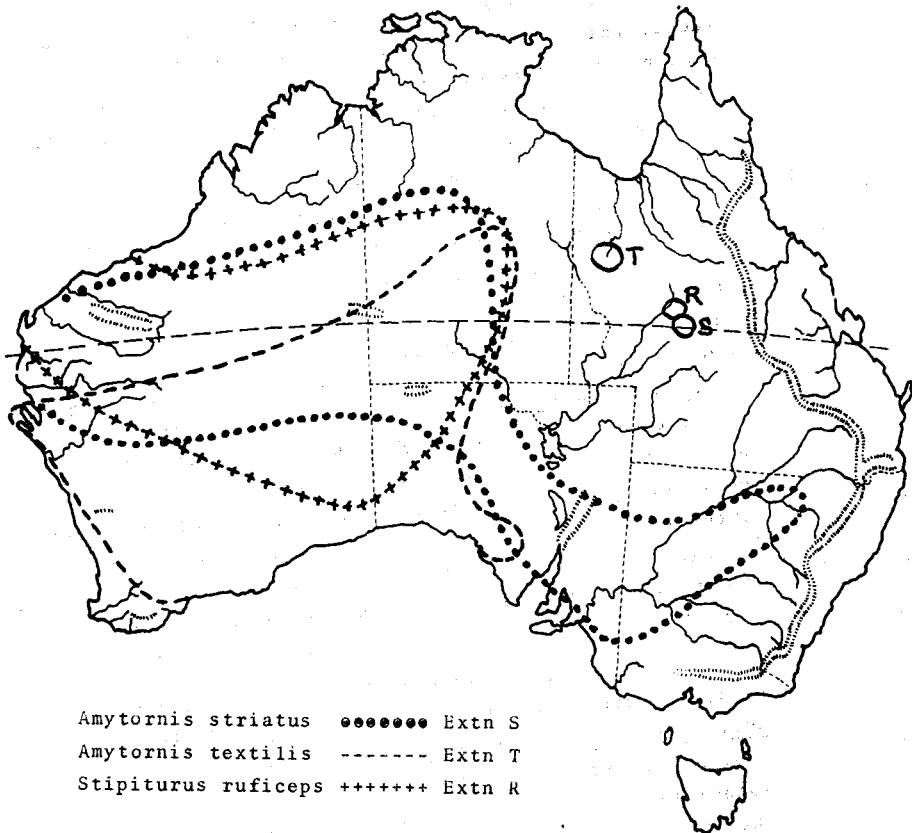
by J.D. Macdonald

In his note on the occurrence of the Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren in Queensland (The Sunbird 1:64) Brigadier Officer referred to a grass-wren having been identified not far south of Opalton. No doubt this comment originated from correspondence I had with Mrs. H.B. Gill on this point. I knew that she and

Brig. Officer had been in the Opalton area about the time I was there and I wondered if she had seen a grass-wren, which in fact she had but was uncertain of its identity until she visited the area a second time.

My wife and I went to these parts in the course of a tour round Australia. We had in mind, as had Mrs. Gill and Brig. Officer, to see the emu-wren reported on by Mr. Ellis Tucker. We failed to find it but found instead the Striated Grass-Wren, Amytornis striatus. Opalton is a "ghost" town about 60 miles south of Winton, from which place, as I understand, it is easily accessible. We were travelling northwest and to save time and mileage expected to find Opalton by going west from Longreach. It was an easy road as far as Vergemont Station but after that we got lost on a selection of alternative tracks over Vergemont Creek, taking one which led into a low range of hills marking the watershed between the Cooper and the Diamantina. Opals occur there and numerous blind tracks connect old diggings. We got bushed on them for 24 hours; it is rather disconcerting, after proceeding in what one imagined to be a straight line, to come again to a place where one had been several hours and 30 miles previously. It was on this laborious and circuitous tour that we found Amytornis striatus, and in association with porcupine grass which is widespread in the area. As near as I can determine the location was 23°30'S, 142°45'E, about 20 miles south of Opalton.

Porcupine grass was first noted about 10 miles east of Vergemont and along with it appeared small parties of the Plumed Pigeon which, according to my records, extends the distribution of this charming little ground



species some distance further into Queensland. I had first seen it on the Diamantina at Monkira Station in 1963, which at that time also had taken its known range a step further east.

Grass-Wrens do not present themselves for easy identification; they are accomplished in the art of keeping out of sight, usually under the other side of a clump of porcupine grass, especially if they have found out that you want to see them. I had glimpses of reddish back and white throat, features of A. striatus. But by rights the species should have been A. textilis, whose habitat preference seems to be such stony hills, whereas A. striatus has usually been found in plains country; clearly it is unwise to be certain on such matters. Also, A. textilis had recently been found in similar rocky areas around Cloncurry and Mt. Isa (Mem. Qld. Mus., 1970, 15:335-341), and the Opalton hills are a continuation of the Selwyn Ranges, part of the saucer rim of the Eyre basin. In the face of such conflicting evidence, casting doubt on my identification, authentication seemed advisable and a specimen was collected, a female. It is now in the Queensland Museum. A detailed examination of the specimen in comparison with examples of other populations has not yet been made.

Thus in the past year three species have been newly discovered in Queensland, Amytornis striatus, Amytornis textilis and Stipiturus ruficeps, the last still a sight record and supposedly this species, but on the authority of competent observers; and not so long ago the Spinifex-bird Eremiornis carteri was found for the first time, in the Cloncurry area. In each case ranges were considerably extended from west and south (see map), indicating how incomplete our knowledge was, and may still be, of the birds of western Queensland, especially of "spinifex" country. It is certain that these birds will

be found in other areas of porcupine grass, or at least in patches not subject to constant burning over, which must take an enormous toll of the unique animal life associated with this unique vegetation.

KOEL DISPLAY

by Miss Ella Pratt ϕ

This spring, 1970, the large influx of Koels Eudynamys scolopacea into our district has been much heavier than usual. The consequential competition has resulted in so much displaying by males that we have not only seen this for the first time, but have been able to observe it in detail. Part of the display is reminiscent of that of the Rifle-bird Ptiloris paradiseus.

The display seems to start with a lot of feverish calling. Soon the contending males sit on a limb in a hunched position about three to five feet apart. One bird stares fixedly at the other for a period, then the opposing bird in turn does the same thing. They sometimes maintain this visual confrontation for long periods. At other times one bird will lower its head briefly and give an ear-splitting call, then raise itself on one leg, spreading out one wing or both. The other male counters by likewise raising his body from his hunched position and spreading not only both wings and tail, but perhaps raising the neck and head feathers too, meanwhile calling loudly. Should a female call in the area, both male birds call even more loudly and dart

ϕ Reserve Creek, Murwillumbah, N.S.W. 2484.

at each other. If the female remains in the vicinity, the males will continue to display and call until she moves away.

This is the first season in which male Koels have been seen here displaying against each other, though previously single males have been observed displaying in a less spectacular manner to a female.

COMMUNAL FEEDING OF
WHITE-NAPED HONEYEATER FLEDGELING

by O.M.G. Newman,
P.M. and R.D. Sothman

A very vocal and agitated flock of about 12 White-naped Honeyeaters Melithreptus lunatus was encountered in open forest by a dry creek at Pullenvale on September 2, 1970. One bird was of particular interest in that it had black underparts, although in other respects it had adult plumage (white nape band, black cap, green back and red orbital ring). Subsequently, one fledgeling bird was located in a mass of lantana. We consider the bird had only recently left the nest. It became apparent that the bird was being fed by the majority of the flock of adult birds, on one occasion three birds queuing up and feeding the bird consecutively.

When a very close approach was made in order to photograph the fledgeling being fed, two birds approached, perching on twigs within one foot of the photographer's face and churring agitatedly. While this distraction took place, other adult birds enticed the fledgeling to move into

denser cover. One of the two distracting birds was the one with black underparts, which at one stage suddenly begged to the other distracting bird and was fed by it. However, it was subsequently established that the black-bellied bird was quite capable of feeding itself as it was observed to obtain food and feed the fledgeling on a number of occasions.

On a visit to the area at a later date, a nest was located in the outer branches of an ironbark Eucalyptus sp. at a height of about 40 feet. This nest was repeatedly visited by the black-bellied White-naped Honeyeater, as well as at least one normal adult bird. No sign was seen of the fledgeling bird.

Examples of communal nesting behaviour are most pronounced in the Australasian region and have been attributed to selection for survival in a harsh, arid environment. Harrison (1969) lists two instances of more than one adult pair of White-naped Honeyeater feeding young at one nest and in the same genus there are instances of communal breeding behaviour for the Golden-backed Honeyeater Melithreptus laetior, and the Brown-headed Honeyeater Melithreptus brevirostris.

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MIGRATION MOVEMENT DATES
MURWILLUMBAH DISTRICT

by Miss Ella Pratt

Migrants returning for the summer at Reserve Creek,
near Murwillumbah, northeast N.S.W., were as follows:

Dollar-bird.....September 23, 1970.
Sacred Kingfisher.....September 24, 1970.
Spine-tailed Swift.....October 9, 1970.
Brush Cuckoo.....October 1, 1970.
Koel.....September 12, 1970 in
very large numbers.
Channel-billed Cuckoo.....September 29, 1970.
Leaden Flycatcher.....September 15, 1970 in
greater numbers than usual;
as many as eight in one tree.
Cicada-bird.....October 12, 1970.
Spangled Drongo.....September 12, 1970.

Species leaving the area for the summer season:-

Grey Fantail.....early October, 1970.
Rufous Fantail.....late September, 1970, but
odd birds remain throughout
the year.
Rose Robin.....September 12, 1970.
Golden Whistler.....early October, 1970.

BIRD MOVEMENTS IN THE BRISBANE SUBURB OF BELMONT

by Mrs. Joanna Morgan

Species leaving for winter and returning for summer, 1970:

	Departure	Arrival
Channel-billed Cuckoo.....	mid-February	September 30
Koel.....	mid-January	October 12
Brush Cuckoo.....	none for 1970	October 30
Little Bronze-Cuckoo.....	January 14	September 9
Sacred Kingfisher.....	late February	mid-September
Dollar-bird.....	none for 1970	September 9
(This 1970 arrival is 13 days earlier than any previous record.)		
Cicada-bird.....	mid-March	October 6
Leaden Flycatcher.....	late April	September 6
Black-faced Flycatcher.....	mid-March	September 17

Species returning for winter and leaving for summer, 1970:

	Arrival	Departure
Rainbow-bird.....	February 26	mid-September
Rose Robin.....	April 17	September 3
Grey Fantail.....	March 26	September 18
Golden Whistler.....	early March	late September
Scarlet Honeyeater.....	March 21	mid-August
Yellow-faced Honeyeater.....	Local birds all year round with increase to 6± only this past season during May to August.	
Eastern Spinebill.....	April 24	September 13

Although only a few miles from the coast, the situation of Belmont is such that it receives no large migratory flocks of such birds as honeyeaters.

FIRST RECORD OF THE BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER
IN SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

by Robin Elks

On January 16, 1971 while watching waders on mud flats at Thornside (Brisbane) in company with David Perkins and Carole Bevege, a sandpiper was sighted which superficially resembled a Curlew Sandpiper Calidris ferruginea. However, the bird had a well-marked back and soon after was seen in company with a Curlew Sandpiper and Little Stints Calidris ruficollis, at which stage a good size comparison was obtained. The bird was intermediate in size between these two species and was seen to have a very well defined dark stripe down the centre of the head. This feature, along with the black decurved bill, well-marked back and speckling on the sides of the breast led us to think it was a Broad-billed Sandpiper Limicola falcinellus. This identification was confirmed upon closer examination with a telescope (magnification up to x50, distance approximately 30m).

A written description of the bird was taken, and features noted in addition to the above were broad white eyebrow, bill downcurved at tip, black patch at the angle of the wing. The head pattern was distinctive, comprising a white stripe on either side of the dark centre, with brown below and then the white eyebrow. The legs were dark.

In flight, the rump and tail were seen to have a dark centre stripe with white edging; a narrow white wing bar was present.

The bird fed by using a jabbing action something similar to a Little Stint, and from time to time made long

rapid runs. In all, five individuals were seen.

Previous Queensland records are of one bird at Cairns seen by L. Amiet (Emu 57:236), five birds by Mrs. H.B. Gill at Mourilyan Harbour on November 11, 1966 (Emu 70:110), and sightings of up to several hundred birds by Mrs. Gill at Cairns since September 1964 (pers.comm.). As well, members of the Bird Observers' Club recorded up to 12 individuals at Cairns between September 26, 1964 and October 11, 1964.

Brisbane observers are urged to investigate the presence of this rare wader at Thornside and other likely habitats.

NOTES FOR JUNIORS

THE PEREGRINE FALCON (FALCO PEREGRINUS)

AT MALENY (S.E.Q.)

by Gregory Czechura (Junior Member)

Until February 1970 sightings of this species were infrequent in the vicinity of my home which lies on the first step of the Blackall Range facing the Glasshouse Mountains to the south. The birds sighted were adults and appeared to be just "passing through".

In November 1969, I made several visits to Mt. Tibrogargan, one of the Glasshouse Mountains, on which a pair of Peregrines were nesting. On the last visit, a juvenile bird was observed with two adults. A visit in January 1970 failed to locate any of the birds.

On the morning of February 9, 1970, my attention was drawn to a commotion on the hill behind the house. One Nankeen Kestrel Falco cenchroides was circling high in the air chattering shrilly; below it, two birds were racing along at ground level. The first was the other kestrel of the pair, while the second was identified as a young female Peregrine. Shortly after, the falcon tired of the game and was last observed flying eastwards.

All sightings since have been of a juvenile female, and as Mt. Tibrogargan is only some 20-25 miles from my home as the falcon flies, I feel it must be the same bird observed there in November 1969. I haven't been able to watch the falcon make a kill or see her with a kill, but I presume that lorikeets and the larger honeyeaters form a large part of her diet. On one occasion she was seen to stoop on some Pied Currawongs and Crows seeking cover in a Coral Tree, and on another occasion, she dived at a Straw-necked Ibis, but failed to follow the initial attack through.
