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THE SUNBIRD

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EXTENSIONS TO THE KNOWN DISTRIBUTIONS OF SOME BIRDS OF SOUTH-CENTRAL QUEENSLAND

ANDY SHARP and SVEN SEWELL

Idalia National Park is situated approximately 85 km south-west of Blackall (Qld.) near the northern limit of the Mulga Lands Biogeographic Region. The park has an area of approximately 144 000 ha, within which there are various vegetation types. These include Mulga *Acacia aneura* and Bendee *A. catenulata* communities situated on the tops of dissected tablelands, and Gidyea *A. cambagei* and Brigalow *A. harpophylla* communities in the incised valleys and on adjacent claypans.

The records presented here were made during visits between 10 November 1991 and 5 September 1994. During this period, 25 months were spent at Idalia National Park, incorporating all four seasons of the year. A diurnal watch of birds visiting a water hole, conducted by both authors, on a seasonal basis, provided various records, while others resulted from casual observations. The 123 bird species recorded within Idalia National Park or its environs, including the town of Blackall, are detailed in Appendix 1. A number of these observations represent the limits of the ranges of the species concerned. Such records are summarised in Table 1. In addition, the known ranges of several species were extended during the study. These range extensions are detailed in this paper. Recorded dates for each sighting are those when the first formal notes were made, although some birds were seen prior to these dates.

The water hole watch was conducted at "Junction Hole" (24°49'01.03"S, 144°43'42.42"E), which is a natural, permanent, spring fed water hole. This water hole is located in an area of low open woodland, dominated by Brigalow and Poplar Box *Eucalyptus populnea*, with a sparse understorey dominated by Wilga *Geijera parviflora* and *Senna* (nee *Cassia*) spp.

TABLE 1: Records of marginal distributions from Idalia National Park.

Species	Storr (1984)	Sighting records	
		Blakers <i>et al.</i> (1984)	Present study
Bar-shouldered Dove <i>Geopelia humeralis</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	W to 25°S, 146°E	Junction Hole (24°49'01.03"S, 144°43'42.42"E)
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo <i>Cacatua galerita</i>	W to Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	W into cent. Qld. to 25S, 144_E	Junction Hole Idalia homestead (24°53'35.86"S, 144°45'45.65"E)
Laughing Kookaburra <i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	W to Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	W to 24°S, 144°E	Junction Hole Cameron's Tank (24°43'00.85"S, 144°44'17.43"E)
Splendid Fairy-wren <i>Malurus splendens</i>	E to Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	N to 25°S, 145°E	24°41'44.15"S, 144°44'12.41"E
Speckled Warbler <i>Chthonicola sagittata</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	W to 25°S, 145°E	24°42'06.76"S, 144°43'46.39"E See also Joseph (1992)

TABLE 1 cont.

Species	Storr (1984)	Sighting Blakers <i>et al.</i> (1984)	records Present study
Inland Thornbill <i>Acanthiza apicalis</i>	locality within range	found in region but not south or west into the 25°S, 145°E square	24°41'44.17"S, 144°44'13.84"E
Yellow Thornbill <i>Acanthiza nana</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	W to 25°S, 144°E	Junction Hole
Striped Honeyeater <i>Plectorhyncha lanceolata</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	W to 25°S, 143°E: low reporting rate	Junction Hole Cameron's Tank
Noisy Friarbird <i>Philemon corniculatus</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	W into central Qld. to 25°S, 144°E	Junction Hole
Little Friarbird <i>Philemon citreogularis</i>	inland to Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	NW into cent. Qld. to 25°S, 143°E	Junction Hole Cameron's Tank
Pied Honeyeater <i>Certhionyx variegatus</i>	E to 58km W of Longreach (23°26'S, 144°15'E) E to Eromanga (26°40'S, 143°16'E)	NE to 24°S, 146°E	Junction Hole

TABLE 1 cont.

Species	Storr (1984)	Sighting Blakers <i>et al.</i> (1984)	records Present study
Eastern Yellow Robin <i>Eopsaltria australis</i>	W to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	NW into cent. Qld. to 26°S, 146°E	Junction Hole See also Joseph (1992)
Hall's Babbler <i>Pomatostomus halli</i>	E to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	E to 25°S, 144°E	throughout Idalia N.P. on tablelands
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush <i>Cinclosoma castaneothorax</i>	E to Blackall district (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	no record	Emmet Pocket Jump-up (24°43'37.12"S, 144°39'33.93"E)
White-winged Chough <i>Corcorax melanorhamphos</i>	W to Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E)	W to 25°S, 144°E	throughout Idalia N.P.
Double-barred Finch <i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>	inland to Gowan Range, near Mt. Grey (24°38'S, 144°40'E)	in the Emmet region; 25°S, 144°E	Junction Hole
Plum-headed Finch <i>Neochmia modesta</i>	W to Opalton (23°15'S, 142°46'E) W to Toompine (27°13'S, 144°22'E)	W to the Emmet region; 25°S, 144°E	Junction Hole

SPOTLESS CRAKE *Porzana tabuensis*

Storr (1984) considered the Spotless Crake to be a coastal bird in Queensland, recording it only as far west as Westwood (23°37'S, 150°09'E), while Blakers *et al.* (1984) have reported sightings as far west as 25°S, 147°E, although at a low reporting rate (<11%).

One individual was sighted, on 7 December 1991, in the proximity of Hobb's Tank (24°46'43.37"S, 144°44'11.62"E). This record represents a range extension of approximately 200 km westwards. Hobb's Tank is an earth tank bounded by a sparse ground cover of Bluebush *Maireana* spp. and Hopbush *Dodonea* spp. It is likely that this record represents a vagrant individual, for this species' preferred habitat is water bodies surrounded by dense vegetation (Blakers *et al.* 1984). This vagrancy supposition is supported by Blakers *et al.* (1984) who note that this species has the ability to move long distances beyond its normal range. In addition, this individual was sighted on only one occasion and was not in the vicinity of the tank several days later.

SPINFEX PIGEON *Geophaps plumifera*

Spinifex Pigeons are generally considered to be birds of the arid and semi-arid interior, west and north-west of Australia. Storr (1984) reports them as far east as "Trinidad" Station, in the Cheviot Range (25°35'S, 143°53'E). Their range as recorded in Blakers *et al.* (1984) is similar; ie. to approximately 25°S, 144°E.

Two Spinifex Pigeons were observed in the vicinity of Cameron's Tank (24°43'00.85"S, 144°44'17.43"E) on 11 July 1994. Both birds were feeding on the ground amongst a thick shrub layer. Subsequently, two Spinifex Pigeons were observed at the same location on 30 July, 31 July and 13 August 1994; it is presumed that these sightings were of the same two individuals. In addition, the call of a Spinifex Pigeon was heard on 31 August 1994, also at Cameron's Tank. These records represent a range extension of approximately 80 km eastwards.

The apparent recent inhabitation of *Idalia* by this species is possibly due to the comparatively higher abundance of seeding native grasses, following good rainfall in March 1994. Prior to this, the return of native grasses after de-stocking in 1989 had been gradual. The increased abundance of grasses, along with the year-round supplies of water from human-made water sources, may provide suitable habitat for Spinifex Pigeons on a permanent basis.

MULGA PARROT *Psephotus varius*

Both Blakers *et al.* (1984) and Storr (1984) report the northern limit of the range of the Mulga Parrot to be the Charleville region (26°24'S, 146°15'E).

Mulga Parrots were sighted on several occasions, often drinking in pairs, and on one occasion in a group of three at Junction Hole. They were often in association

with small flocks of Australian Ringnecks *Barnardius zonarius*. Drinking at Junction Hole usually occurred in the morning hours (0730-0900h) and was noted in three seasons (spring 1992, summer 1993 and autumn 1993). Mulga Parrots were also sighted on several occasions in the vicinity of Cameron's Tank in the above three seasons and in winter 1992.

As this species is considered sedentary (Blakers *et al.* 1984), it is likely that a small resident population exists in the National Park. These records represent a range extension of approximately 200 km to the north-west.

BOURKE'S PARROT *Neopsephotus bourkii*

Bourke's Parrot is a bird of the arid and semi-arid interior and west. In Queensland it has been reported as far north as Windorah (25°25'S, 142°39'E) and east to Adavale (25°54'S, 144°36'E) and the Yowah Opal Fields (27°58'S, 144°38'E) (Storr 1984). Blakers *et al.* (1984) report an easterly distribution similar to that noted by Storr (1984). However, the northern limit of records in Blakers *et al.* (1984) is one degree south of Storr's for the region.

On 27 October 1992, six Bourke's Parrots were sighted near the north-eastern boundary of the National Park (24°41'54.84"S, 144°44'57.75"E) at approximately 1720h. On initial contact, all six birds were feeding on the ground. However, two soon took flight while the remaining four flew into a nearby Boree tree *A. tephрина*. All four individuals, observed for eight minutes, were either females or immatures. Two days later, another sighting of three birds, in flight, was made approximately 3 km to the north-east of the original sighting, at 24°41'22.76"S, 144°45'25.01"E. It is probable that both sightings were of the same birds.

The area in which these sightings occurred was much traversed by one of us (AS) over the last two and a half years; however, no sightings, other than those reported here, were made. For these reasons, it is considered unlikely that a resident population exists in the park. These records extend the documented range of this species by approximately two degrees north of the Blakers *et al.* (1984) north-eastern limit and two degrees east of the Storr (1984) eastern limit.

COMMON KOEL *Eudynamis scolopacea*

The Common Koel, a migratory cuckoo, was heard (by both authors) once at Idalia National Park, in the summer of 1992-93. This individual was heard late in the afternoon, just prior to sundown, at Cameron's Tank. Blakers *et al.* (1984) report that Common Koels have been recorded between the Queensland coast and 1 degree north-east of Idalia. Likewise, Storr (1984) records their distribution as far west as the Tambo district, approximately 150 km east of Idalia. This record represents a large extension to the known range of this species.

BROWN-HEADED HONEYEATER *Melithreptus brevirostris*

Storr (1984) reports the northern and western limits of the range of the Brown-headed Honeyeater as 20 km north of Tambo and 43 km west-south-west of Tambo, respectively. Idalia National Park is approximately 100 km west of Tambo.

Brown-headed Honeyeaters are likely to be permanent residents in the park, for they were regularly sighted at Junction Hole, during all days on which the water hole watch was conducted (spring 1992, summer 1993, autumn 1993 and winter 1993). Up to eight birds were observed visiting the water hole at a time, often in groups with White-plumed Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus penicillatus*, Brown Honeyeaters *Lichmera indistincta* and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters *Acanthagenys rufogularis*.

LEADEN FLYCATCHER *Myiagra rubecula*

Storr (1984) reports this species from as far west as the Warrego Range (146°15'S, 24°53'E), 20 km north of Tambo. Similarly, records exist in Blakers *et al.* (1984) for the species only as far west as 147°S, 24°E. Recording of this species within Idalia National Park represents a range extension westward of approximately 100 km.

One individual was sighted at Junction Hole on 8 November 1992 at 0558h. It was observed drinking for less than one minute and did not remain in the vicinity of the waterhole. In addition, a female flycatcher was sighted at Cameron's Tank on 11 February 1993. Only a fleeting glimpse was obtained of this individual and it was not positively identified to species level. It was either a female Leaden Flycatcher or a female Satin Flycatcher *Myiagra cyanoleuca*, both of which are not previously known from this region.

As only one individual was positively identified over the 34 month period, it is likely that this record represents a vagrant individual or that the species occurs at extremely low densities in this region.

FIGBIRD *Sphecotheres viridis*

Figbirds are reported to be an easterly species, venturing west only as far as the Carnarvon Range (Storr 1984). Blakers *et al.* (1984) report sightings slightly west of this location (146°E), though at a low reporting rate (<11%).

One individual was sighted at Shamrock Street, Blackall (24°25'S, 145°28'E) on 28 April 1993. It is unlikely that this species will be found in the surrounding, undisturbed area. This individual was probably a vagrant, attracted by several cultivated fruiting trees (including *Ficus* spp.) in the town. This sighting represents a westerly extension of this species range by approximately 100 km.

PIED CURRAWONG *Strepera graculina*

Storr (1984) reports the Pied Currawong ranging west to 40 km west-north-west of Tambo (24°53'S, 146°15'E), while Blakers *et al.* (1984) record them as far west as 25°S, 146°E. Idalia National Park is one degree west of this point.

Pied Currawongs were commonly observed in the park, at both Cameron's Tank and drinking at Junction Hole. The common occurrence of this species suggests the existence of a resident population in the park.

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APPENDIX 1: Abundance, distribution and seasonality of birds within Idalia National Park, based on observations by A. Sharp and S. Sewell

Common name	Scientific name	Abundance	Distribution	Seasonality
Emu	<i>Dromaius novaehollandiae</i>	C	W	Y
Stubble Quail *	<i>Coturnix pectoralis</i>	O		
Black Swan	<i>Cygnus atratus</i>	O		
Australian Wood Duck	<i>Chenonetta jubata</i>	U	L	Y
Pacific Black Duck	<i>Anas superciliosa</i>	O		
Grey Teal	<i>Anas gracilis</i>	U		
Pink-eared Duck	<i>Malacorhynchus membranaceus</i>	O		
Hardhead	<i>Aythya australis</i>	O		
Australasian Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus novaehollandiae</i>	U	L	Y
Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	U	L	Y
Australian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	O		
White-faced Heron	<i>Egretta novaehollandiae</i>	U	L	Y
White-necked Heron	<i>Ardea pacifica</i>	U	L	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	O		
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	<i>Platalea flavipes</i>	O		
Square-tailed Kite	<i>Lophoictinia isura</i>	O		
Black-breasted Buzzard	<i>Hamirostra melanosternon</i>	O		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	O		
Whistling Kite	<i>Haliastur sphenurus</i>	O		
Brown Goshawk	<i>Accipiter fasciatus</i>	U	W	Y
Collared Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter cirrhocephalus</i>	O		
Wedge-tailed Eagle	<i>Aquila audax</i>	C	W	Y
Brown Falcon	<i>Falco berigora</i>	C	W	Y
Australian Hobby	<i>Falco longipennis</i>	O		
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	U	W	Y
Nankeen Kestrel	<i>Falco cenchroides</i>	O		
Brolga	<i>Grus rubicundus</i>	O		
Spotless Crake	<i>Porzana tabuensis</i>	O		
Black-tailed Native-hen	<i>Gallinula ventralis</i>	O		
Australian Bustard	<i>Ardeotis australis</i>	O		
Little Button-quail	<i>Turnix velox</i>	U		
Bush Stone-curlew	<i>Burhinus grallarius</i>	U	W	Y
Black-fronted Dotterel	<i>Elsayornis melanops</i>	C	L	Y
Banded Lapwing	<i>Vanellus tricolor</i>	O		
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	O		
Common Bronzewing	<i>Phaps chalcoptera</i>	C	W	Y
Crested Pigeon	<i>Ocyphaps lophotes</i>	VC	W	Y
Spinifex Pigeon	<i>Geophaps plumifera</i>	O		
Diamond Dove	<i>Geopelia cuneata</i>	C	W	SUM
Peaceful Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	C	L	Y
Bar-shouldered Dove	<i>Geopelia humeralis</i>	C	W	Y
Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo	<i>Calyptorhynchus banksii</i>	O		

APPENDIX 1 cont.

Galah	<i>Cacatua roseicapilla</i>	VC	W	Y
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	<i>Cacatua galerita</i>	U	W	Y
Cockatiel	<i>Nymphicus hollandicus</i>	O		
Red-winged Parrot	<i>Aprosmictus erythropterus</i>	VC	W	Y
Australian Ringneck	<i>Barnardius zonarius</i>	C	W	Y
Mulga Parrot	<i>Psephotus varius</i>	U	W	Y
Budgerigar	<i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>	C	W	Y
Bourke's Parrot	<i>Neopsephotus bourkii</i>	U	W	Y
Pallid Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus pallidus</i>	O		
Brush Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis variolosus</i>	O		
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx basalis</i>	O		
Common Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	O		
Channel-billed Cuckoo	<i>Scythrops novaehollandiae</i>	O		
Southern Boobook	<i>Ninox novaeseelandiae</i>	C	W	Y
Tawny Frogmouth	<i>Podargus strigoides</i>	C	W	Y
Spotted Nightjar	<i>Eurostopodus argus</i>	C	W	Y
Australian Owlet-nightjar	<i>Aegotheles cristatus</i>	O		
Laughing Kookaburra	<i>Dacelo novaeguineae</i>	C	W	Y
Sacred Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus sanctus</i>	U	L	Y
Rainbow Bee-eater	<i>Merops ornatus</i>	C	W	SPR/SUM
Brown Treecreeper	<i>Climacteris picumnus</i>	C	L	Y
Splendid Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus splendens</i>	U	?	?
Variiegated Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus lamberti</i>	U	?	?
White-winged Fairy-wren	<i>Malurus leucopterus</i>	O		
Striated Pardalote	<i>Pardalotus striatus</i>	O		
Speckled Warbler	<i>Chthonicola sagittata</i>	O		
Weebill	<i>Smicrornis brevirostris</i>	O		
Inland Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza apicalis</i>	O		
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza uropygialis</i>	U	L	Y
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza chrysoorrhoa</i>	C	W	Y
Yellow Thornbill	<i>Acanthiza nana</i>	O		
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	<i>Acanthagenys rufogularis</i>	VC	W	Y
Striped Honeyeater	<i>Plectorhyncha lanceolata</i>	C	W	Y
Noisy Friarbird	<i>Philemon corniculatus</i>	C	W	Y
Little Friarbird	<i>Philemon citreogularis</i>	O		
Yellow-throated Miner	<i>Manorina flavigula</i>	O		
Singing Honeyeater	<i>Lichenostomus virescens</i>	U	W	Y
White-plumed Honeyeater	<i>Lichenostomus penicillatus</i>	VC	W	Y
Brown-headed Honeyeater	<i>Melithreptus brevirostris</i>	C	L	Y
Brown Honeyeater	<i>Lichmera indistincta</i>	VC	W	Y
Black Honeyeater	<i>Certhionyx niger</i>	O		
Pied Honeyeater	<i>Certhionyx variegatus</i>	O		
Crimson Chat	<i>Ephthianura tricolor</i>	U		
Orange Chat	<i>Ephthianura aurifrons</i>	O		
Jacky Winter	<i>Microeca fascians</i>	C	L	Y
Red-capped Robin	<i>Petroica goodenovii</i>	C	W	Y
Hooded Robin	<i>Melanodryas cucullata</i>	C	W	Y
Eastern Yellow Robin	<i>Eopsaltria australis</i>	O		

APPENDIX 1 cont.

Grey-crowned Babbler	<i>Pomatostomus temporalis</i>	VC	W	Y
Hall's Babbler	<i>Pomatostomus halli</i>	U	L	Y
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush	<i>Cinclosoma castaneothorax</i>	U	L	Y
Varied Sittella	<i>Daphoenositta chrysoptera</i>	U	W	Y
Crested Bellbird	<i>Oreoica gutturalis</i>	C	W	Y
Rufous Whistler	<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i>	C	W	Y
Grey Shrike-thrush	<i>Colluricincla harmonica</i>	C	W	Y
Leaden Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra rubecula</i>	O		
Restless Flycatcher	<i>Myiagra inquieta</i>	C	L	Y
Maggie-lark	<i>Grallina cyanoleuca</i>	VC	W	Y
Grey Fantail	<i>Rhipidura fuliginosa</i>	U	?	?
Willie Wagtail	<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>	VC	W	Y
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	U	W	Y
White-winged Triller	<i>Lalage sueurii</i>	C	W	SUM
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	O		
Masked Woodswallow	<i>Artamus personatus</i>	O		
White-browed Woodswallow	<i>Artamus superciliosus</i>	O		
Black-faced Woodswallow	<i>Artamus cinereus</i>	O		
Little Woodswallow	<i>Artamus minor</i>	C	W	Y
Grey Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus torquatus</i>	C	W	Y
Pied Butcherbird	<i>Cracticus nigrogularis</i>	C	W	Y
Australian Magpie	<i>Gymnorhina tibicen</i>	VC	W	Y
Pied Currawong	<i>Strepera graculina</i>	U	W	Y
Australian Raven	<i>Corvus coronoides</i>	C	W	Y
Torresian Crow	<i>Corvus orru</i>	C	W	Y
White-winged Chough	<i>Corcorax melanorhamphos</i>	C	W	Y
Apostlebird	<i>Struthidea cinerea</i>	C	W	Y
Spotted Bowerbird	<i>Chlamydera maculata</i>	C	W	Y
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	U	W	Y
Zebra Finch	<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>	O		
Double-barred Finch	<i>Taeniopygia bichenovii</i>	C	L	Y
Plum-headed Finch	<i>Neochmia modesta</i>	O		
Mistletoebird	<i>Dicaeum hirundinaceum</i>	C	W	Y

* Observed just outside Park boundary

Note: An indication of the distribution and seasonality is only included for species observed on more than an occasional basis.

Abbreviations:

Abundance-	VC Very Common
	C Common
	U Uncommon
	O Occasional Sighting
Distribution-	W Widely distributed within the Park
	L Mostly localised in distribution
	? Unknown
Seasonality-	Y Year round
	SUM Summer visitor
	SPR Spring visitor
	? Unknown

SOUTHERN BREEDING RECORDS OF THE WHITE-EARED MONARCH *MONARCHA LEUCOTIS*

L.E. CONOLE, G.A. BAVERSTOCK and G. HOLMES

The White-eared Monarch *Monarcha leucotis* is regarded as sedentary but uncommon along the Australian east coast as far south as Iluka in New South Wales (29° 24'S, 153° 21'E) (Blakers *et al.* 1984). There is one documented record further south at Woolgoolga (McAllan & Bruce 1988). Opinion differs about whether in parts of its range it is nomadic or migratory (Blakers *et al.* 1984). Of the scant breeding records, the most southerly in the literature, which was also the first nest ever described of this species, was at Stradbroke Island in south-east Queensland (Mayo 1923): the island is now two and the record probably pertains to the larger North Stradbroke (27° 30'S, 153° 30'E). The Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU) Nest Record Scheme has only one White-eared Monarch breeding record, from Innisfail in North Queensland (Jonathan Starks, pers. comm.). Despite the species' occurrence in north-eastern New South Wales, there have been no breeding episodes documented there.

On 24 January 1994, LEC and GAB observed an adult White-eared Monarch with a dependent, flying juvenile in remnant lowland rainforest at Woolgoolga Creek Flora Reserve (30° 07'S, 153° 12'E), about 20 km north of Coff's Harbour. The juvenile was closely attended and fed by the adult, had pale buff-brown and white plumage in contrast to the adult's black and white, and a yellow gape. These features considered together suggest that the juvenile had only recently left the nest, and was almost certainly fledged at Woolgoolga Creek. The principal vegetation communities in the flora reserve are subtropical rainforest of the White Booyong *Argyrodendron trifoliolatum* alliance - Blue Quandong *Elaeocarpus grandis* suballiance, and warm temperate rainforest of the Coachwood *Ceratopetalum apetalum* alliance - Coachwood/White Booyong/Yellow Carabeen *Sloanea woollsii* suballiance (Floyd 1989a, 1989b). A cleared grassy area leads into the reserve from farmland, and extensive thickets of Common Lantana *Lantana camara* line the rainforest margins.

This breeding record is almost two and a half degrees of latitude south (approximately 250 - 270 km) of the previous most southerly documented record (Blakers *et al.* 1984, Mayo 1923). At Widgee (26° 13'S, 152° 28'E), White-eared Monarchs are said to arrive in August, breed, and depart by December (Hughes & Hughes 1980). However, the Woolgoolga birds must have commenced breeding in December to have fledged young by the last week of January, for the incubation and fledging periods are each thought to last about 14 days (Frith 1977). Beruldsen (1978) suggests that breeding occurs throughout the bird's distribution from October to December, but occasionally as late as January. The single foraging adult was observed 'bouncing' on the outer canopy of low,

rainforest edge vegetation over a creek bordering a clearing. By this method the birds apparently disturb insects that they then capture and eat (Beruldsen 1978). The juvenile was not seen to forage, but only to make infrequent, short flights to the adult to receive food. Neither bird was seen to employ the fantail (*Rhipidura*)-like sallying mentioned by various authors (Frith 1976, Pizzey 1980, Slater *et al.* 1988). The birds were observed at midday, in the heat of the day when most other species except pigeons were inactive, consistent with the observations of Beruldsen (1978) and Pizzey (1980).

We are aware of three prior southern breeding records. An egg was collected by S. Ellis at Iluka in 1917, pre-dating the first published record. The egg was examined and photographed in the collection of N. Browne (East Ballina) by GH in 1987. Another record is of two adults on 29 December 1981 at Breakfast Creek, Mount Warning (28° 24'S, 153° 17'E), New South Wales. The birds were feeding close to the ground in Common Lantana and making regular trips away from the foraging site with food. Items included the abdomens of three small cicadas, and "they were obviously feeding young" (J. Izzard, pers. comm.). Finally, on 11 February 1993 at Beechmont (28° 08'S, 153° 12'E), Queensland, GH observed an adult feeding a dependent juvenile that was begging for food. Its underparts were reddish brown and its head pattern was obscure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Dave Charley (Head Ranger, New South Wales National Parks & Wildlife Service, Lismore) who informed LEC of the significance of the Woolgoolga record. Rory O'Brien (Ornithology, Museum of Victoria) assisted in locating some references. Jonathon Starks (RAOU Nest Record Scheme) searched the nest record scheme for breeding data. Improvements on an earlier manuscript were suggested by Stephen Debus and an anonymous referee.

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THE FAMILY MELIPHAGIDAE OF THE COOKTOWN AREA, NORTH QUEENSLAND

J.A. McLEAN

SUMMARY

Data assembled between June 1983 and June 1994 from field observations at Cooktown are presented here for the Family Meliphagidae. Eighteen species were recorded from a comparatively small area, including five confirmed breeding species. An attempt has been made to allocate each species to one or more of six habitat types in the annotated species list. Sightings of an additional five species from the nearby Big Tableland, two of which are recorded by another author, are also included, making a total of twenty-three species.

STUDY AREA AND METHODS

The main study area, centred on Cooktown (15°28'S, 145°17'E), comprises about 215 km² (see Fig. 1). Field observations were conducted intermittently between 1983 and 1989, but these were more systematic and more frequent from 1990 to June 1994. For more details of the study area, including climate, see McLean (1994). Six habitat types were recognised, namely closed forest, woodland, heathland, wetland, mangrove, and parks and gardens. The study area encompasses two small national parks: Endeavour River (1840 ha, mostly melaleuca wetland, mangroves and heathland), and Mt Cook (493 ha, closed forest). Woodland is the dominant habitat in the Cooktown area, but these national parks incorporate small areas of each habitat other than parks and gardens. Sixteen of the eighteen honeyeater species recorded in this 215 km² area have been recorded in these fully protected areas. The primary feeding floras utilised are *Amyema* spp., *Banksia dentata*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Castanospermum australe*, *Eucalyptus* spp., *Ficus* spp., *Grevillea* spp. (particularly *G. pteridiifolia*, which may flower for 6 months from May to October), *Lophostemon suaveolens*, *Melaleuca* spp. and *Schefflera actinophylla*. Wetland areas, notably the Endeavour and Annan rivers, Pooles and Keatings lagoons, and various ephemeral water holes, are detailed in McLean (1994). Mount Cook (429 m) and Mount Milman (371 m) provide the only significant elevated topography in an otherwise lowland setting.

Four brief visits were made to the cooler, wetter uplands of the Big Tableland (at about 800 m) on 12 March 1989, 7 July 1991, 18 April 1992 and 19 June 1994. This area, only 15 km south of the southern boundary in Fig. 1, is dominated by closed forest, with some woodland on the lower slopes. Mount Amos (874 m) and the much lower Helenvale, Shiptons Flat and Rossville, which feature as honeyeater localities in Storr (1953, 1984), are peripheral to this Big Tableland

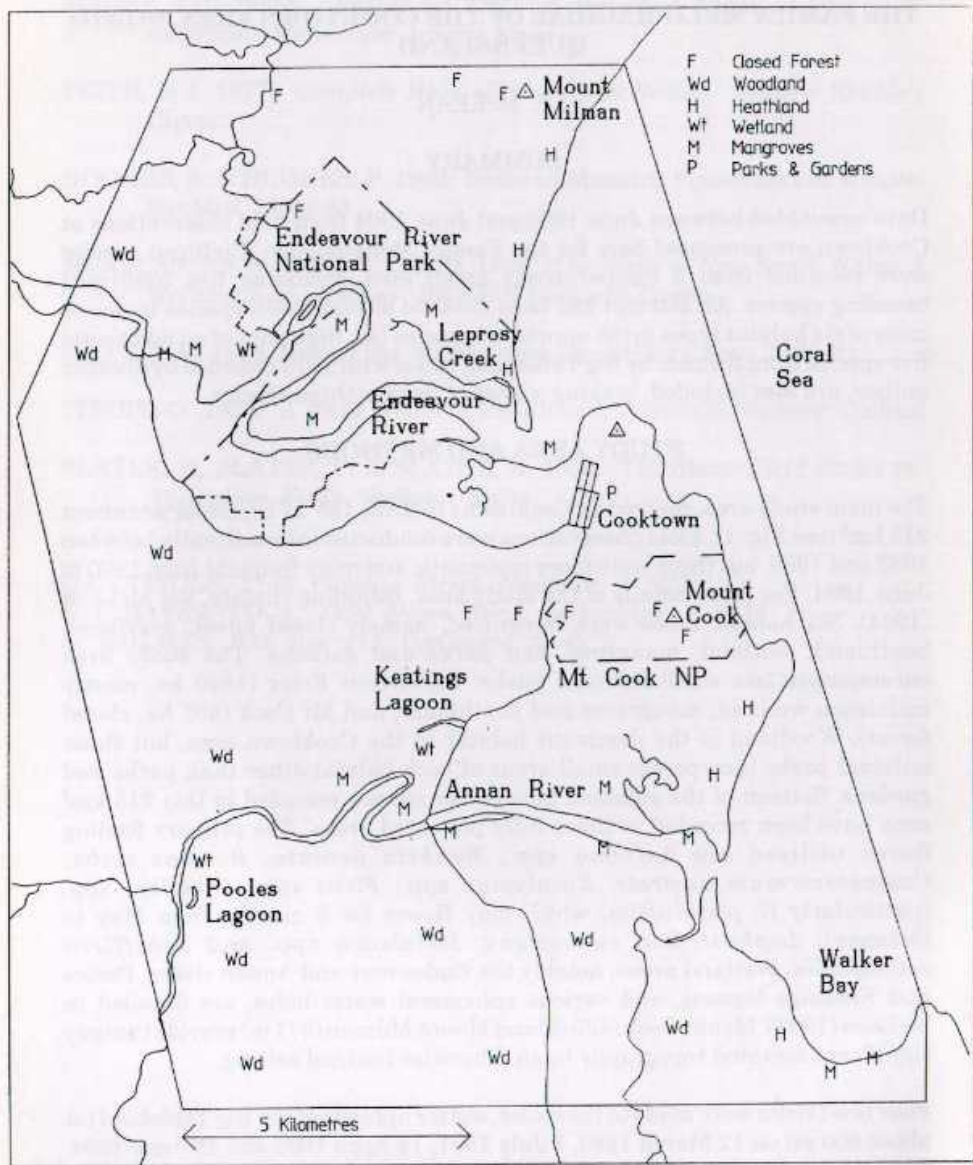


Fig. 1. The main study area, centred on Cooktown.

area. The five honeyeater species known from Big Tableland, but not recorded in the 215 km² study area, are included here.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fourteen honeyeater species (Family Meliphagidae) were recorded from the Cooktown area (15°25'S, 145°15'E) by Blakers *et al.* (1984). Of the eighteen species recorded in the 215 km² study area (Fig. 1) between 1983 and 1994, six were common residents (recorded in all months), four were uncommon residents (recorded in most months), five were uncommon nomads or visitors (spasmodic or regular for part(s) of the year), and three were vagrants (1-3 records over the entire period). Full details, including scientific names and some preferred flora, are included in the Species List. Many species were opportunistic feeders exploiting several habitats. However, most records of Blue-faced, Graceful, Varied, Brown, White-streaked, Bar-breasted and Scarlet Honeyeater were from one or two main feeding areas. Of the 23 Cooktown-Big Tableland species, twelve are endemic to Australia, and four of these are confined to North Queensland (Longmore 1991). Helmeted Friarbird and Yellow-spotted, White-throated, Varied and Brown-backed Honeyeaters were confirmed as breeding species, mostly in the summer (October-April).

Many species are nomadic and some gather in numbers at flowering trees and shrubs. While these inflorescences are important, and markedly seasonal, several honeyeater species are primarily insectivorous rather than nectarivorous, although most species exploit both food sources (see McFarland & Ford 1991). Of ten species in a Cape York Peninsula mixed-species flock in June, only three were seen to take nectar occasionally (Sage 1994). Much of the insectivorous material gleaned by Cooktown species was small and difficult to distinguish. Macro-insects such as grasshoppers (Tettigoniidae, Childs 1976) were eaten by Blue-faced Honeyeaters on several occasions.

Macleay's Honeyeater is scarce at lowland sites in December-January, and its occurrence on the upper slopes of Mount Cook during this period is suggestive of a mid-summer altitudinal movement. There is a decrease in Brown-backed Honeyeater numbers during September-November, when this species appears to be restricted to the vicinity of perennial bodies of water. By about March, when ephemeral wetland areas have benefited from summer rainfall, this species is again widespread and numerous. Mention of the White-streaked Honeyeater by Blakers *et al.* (1984) refers to the Shiptons Flat population of this Cape York Peninsula endemic as being isolated. Two birds were seen at nearby Helenvale in July, but most recent records involve very small numbers in sclerophyllous (heath) foredune vegetation or woodland vegetation at Cooktown in September-December and February-May. The localised or seasonal occurrence

of many species is well illustrated by September-October 1948 and March 1991 flocks of Scarlet Honeyeaters near Rossville (c. 200 m), which contrast with my single Cooktown sighting on 4 November 1992, when I also recorded my only Bar-breasted Honeyeater. These two species were feeding communally with Yellow, White-streaked, Banded and Dusky Honeyeaters amongst young buds of a *Melaleuca* sp. and flowers of *Diplatia grandibractea* (a mistletoe) at Pooles Lagoon.

According to Longmore (1991), Yellow-faced Honeyeater, Bridled Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill range north to Big Tableland and neighbouring Mount Amos. McAllan & Filewood (1994) have speculated that their September 1983 sightings of Yellow-faced Honeyeaters at Iron Range probably involved the highly migratory breeding population from south-eastern Australia rather than the probably sedentary population at Big Tableland. The nomadic nature of this family is further illustrated by the first Cape York Peninsula record of three Yellow-throated Miners *Manorina flavigula* near Coen and well to the north of Cooktown on 16 June 1992 (Sage 1994). Unlike many honeyeater species, this miner is generally understood to be sedentary (Keast 1968).

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SPECIES LIST FOR COOKTOWN AND BIG TABLELAND

F Closed forest WD Woodland H Heathland WT Wetlands
 M Mangroves P Parks & Gardens

* Indicates Big Tableland records.

(The following botanical names represent some of the frequented native flowering/fruited genera/species utilised by local honeyeaters.)

HELMETED FRIARBIRD *Philemon buceroides* F WD H WT M P. A common breeding resident, nesting October to February, 3.5 to 10 m above ground on the cross arms of power poles as well as in trees. Nestling mortality was noted at two nests where they were entangled by their legs in polypropylene twine. This was incorporated in the nesting material, particularly about the rim and perhaps contributing to the internal material of the nests. At one nest, two entangled nestlings hanging upside down outside the nest still accepted food from the parents. Seen in flocks of up to 20 birds, often feeding on blossoming *Banksia dentata*, *Bombax ceiba*, *Castanospermum australe*, *Eucalyptus* spp., *Grevillea* spp. and *Melaleuca* spp..

SILVER-CROWNED FRIARBIRD *Philemon argenticeps* WD H WT M P. An uncommon resident, seen in smaller flocks than the previous species. Often feeding with Rainbow Lorikeets *Trichoglossus haematodus* in the same flowering trees as the previous species.

NOISY FRIARBIRD *Philemon corniculatus* WD H WT P. An uncommon visitor; irregular sightings of one or a few birds; numbers increase during October and November.

LITTLE FRIARBIRD *Philemon citreogularis* WD H WT P. An uncommon visitor; flocks of up to 16 birds, usually noted July-December; numbers peak in October-November. It sometimes feeds with larger friarbird species, particularly during late spring on *Eucalyptus tessellaris* blossom.

BLUE-FACED HONEYEATER *Entomyzon cyanotis* WD. An uncommon visitor, recorded in groups of up to seven birds. Mainly found in open eucalypt stands, particularly *E. alba*; occasionally feeding at riparian sites on blossoming *Bombax ceiba* and *Castanospermum australe* along the upper Annan River.

MACLEAY'S HONEYEATER *Xanthotis macleayana* F WD WT M P. An uncommon resident; singles, pairs and groups of up to four birds; scarce December-January, otherwise encountered regularly; margins of closed forest. Often feeding on blossoming *Amyema* sp., *Bombax ceiba* (a large open deciduous tree), *Eucalyptus* spp., *Euodia elleryana*, *Grevillea parallela*, *Mucana gigantea*, *Schefflera actinophylla*. It is fond of the small fruit of a small leafed strangler *Ficus* during summer.

* **LEWIN'S HONEYEATER** *Meliphaga lewinii* F. Recorded at Big Tableland on each visit; 1 - 9 seen or heard.

YELLOW-SPOTTED HONEYEATER *Meliphaga notata* F WD H WT M P. A common breeding resident; nesting October-November, 1.5 to 2.5 m above ground in closed forest and heaths; singles, pairs and small loose flocks. It is fond of the fruit of *Ficus opposita* and *Lantana camara* (introduced). It is often seen at the summits of Mount Cook and Mount Milman.

GRACEFUL HONEYEATER *Meliphaga gracilis* F M. An uncommon resident; usually single birds and restricted to riparian vegetation along North Arm (of the Endeavour River) and occasionally at the summit of Mount Milman.

* **BRIDLED HONEYEATER** *Lichenostomus frenatus*. Recorded by Storr (1953) on three occasions at Big Tableland, during the 1948-49 summer.

* **YELLOW-FACED HONEYEATER** *Lichenostomus chrysops* WD. Two birds were noted on 7 July 1991 at a eucalypt stand at the base of Big Tableland.

VARIED HONEYEATER *Lichenostomus versicolor* M. A common resident; the only evidence of breeding involved the carrying of nesting material near the mouth of the Annan River in March 1992. It is seen in all months near the Annan River mouth and more spasmodically at the Endeavour River harbour and nearby lower Leprosy Creek; almost always associated with mangrove stands in noisy groups of up to seven birds.

* **WHITE-GAPED HONEYEATER** *Lichenostomus unicolor*. Recorded at Helenvale during the 1948-49 summer (Storr 1953).

YELLOW HONEYEATER *Lichenostomus flavus* WD WT M P. An uncommon resident; usually 1 - 3, mostly at flowering eucalypts and *Melaleuca* lined watercourses. It feeds on *Eucalyptus leptophleba* blossom during December and January.

WHITE-THROATED HONEYEATER *Melithreptus albogularis* WD M P. A common breeding resident. A single nest found 6 m above ground in *Eucalyptus alba* had been parasitised by the Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus*, as evidenced by a large dependent fledgling on 2 June 1992. Singles, pairs and small flocks are regular in open eucalypt woodland, particularly *E. alba*.

BROWN HONEYEATER *Lichmera indistincta* H M. A rare nomad; a single bird in mangroves at the mouth of Leprosy Creek in July 1983; a pair feeding on flowering *Grevillea pteridiifolia* with Banded Honeyeaters near Leprosy Creek on 17 September 1992; and a pair in heath at upper Leprosy Creek on 24 November 1992. Wheeler (1967) also observed this species from the Cooktown area during a brief visit in October 1964.

WHITE-STREAKED HONEYEATER *Trichodere cockerelli* WD H. An uncommon nomad; singles, pairs and small parties of up to four birds during February-May and September-December in stands of flowering *Banksia dentata*, *Eucalyptus* spp., *Lophostemon suaveolens* and *Melaleuca symphyocarpa*. It typically feeds with other small bird species such as Dusky Honeyeater and Yellow-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia jugularis*. Two were feeding at a flowering eucalypt at Helenvale on 5 July 1989, and specimens were collected at nearby Shiptons Flat in 1948 (Blakers *et al.* 1984).

BROWN-BACKED HONEYEATER *Ramsayornis modestus* WD H WT M. A common breeding resident; nesting October-April, 1 to 5 m high, almost always over water and associated with *Melaleuca* spp.; singles, pairs, and occasionally flocks of up to 18 birds. Up to eight birds in a group have been seen drinking at Keatings Lagoon during early December; typically only 1-4 birds in mid-summer (late December-February). It feeds on blossoming *Grevillea pteridiifolia*, *Lophostemon suaveolens* and *Melaleuca* spp..

BAR-BREASTED HONEYEATER *Ramsayornis fasciatus* WT. A rare nomad; two adults foraging amongst young buds of a *Melaleuca* sp. and flowers of *Diplatia grandibractea* (mistletoe) by Pooles Lagoon on 4 November 1992. Other nectarivorous birds present and feeding communally were Yellow, White-streaked, Banded, Scarlet and Dusky Honeyeaters.

* EASTERN SPINEBILL *Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris* F. A single adult observed at the summit of Big Tableland on 7 July 1991. During the 1948-49 summer, this species was occasionally seen here, usually in secondary growth (Storr 1953).

BANDED HONEYEATER *Certhionyx pectoralis* WD H WT. An uncommon nomad; singles and loose flocks of up to 18 birds are recorded in some years, usually from September to early December. Five birds noted on 6 April 1987 and a pair on 10 May 1994 were feeding at late flowering *Melaleuca viridiflora*. It also feeds on blossoming *Diplatia grandibractea*, *Erythrophleum chlorostacys*, *Eucalyptus* spp. (particularly *E. tessellaris*), *Grevillea pteridiifolia*, *Lophostemon suaveolens* and *Melaleuca* spp.; feeds communally with White-throated, Brown-backed and Dusky Honeyeaters.

DUSKY HONEYEATER *Myzomela obscura* F WD H WT M P. A common resident; singles, pairs and small flocks. One of the first and most regular species to call at dawn. It is often recorded from the summit of Mount Cook and Mount Milman; fond of the nectar of *Eucalyptus intermedia* in April - May and *Amyema sanguineum* (mistletoe) in October - November.

SCARLET HONEYEATER *Myzomela sanguinolenta* F WT. Small flocks in riparian vegetation near Rossville in September - October 1948 (Storr 1953) and on 31 March 1991; also recorded by Storr (1953) on a western scarp of Big Tableland. The only other record involves an adult female and an immature foraging at the upper and outermost foliage of a flowering *Melaleuca* sp. at Pooles Lagoon on 4 November 1992.

NOTES ON THE RUFIOUS OWL IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

LLOYD NIELSEN

The Rufous Owl *Ninox rufa* is found only in tropical northern Australia and New Guinea, and is the sole Australian *Ninox* owl restricted to the tropics. It is a large species, which, like the closely related Powerful Owl *N. strenua*, exhibits normal sexual size dimorphism - males are larger than females. Males weigh 1150-1130 g and females weigh 700-1050 g (Hollands 1991). This short paper reports observations on the North Queensland race of the Rufous Owl *N.r. queenslandica*, from the Mt Molloy-Julatten-Mt Carbine area, where it is generally regarded as rare by local bird-watchers.

Habitat in this region is ideal for the Rufous Owl, consisting of open tropical woodland intersected by creeks and rivers lined with gallery forest. While the gallery forest provides diurnal roosts for the large owl, potential prey such as many bird species and the Spectacled Flying-fox *Pteropus conspicillatus* and Little Red Flying-fox *P. scapulatus* occur in the surrounding woodland.

Playback of taped calls was carried out at ten sites over two nights during August 1993. This produced sightings of single birds at three locations. Another site is known where a male can be seen roosting by day through the breeding season. It appears to be an extremely elusive species and difficult to locate when present. Even in a known territory where spotlighting is carried out regularly - approximately one or two nights a week - it is rarely seen. In contrast, other *Ninox* and *Tyto* owls are seen frequently; e.g. there have been only two observations of Rufous Owls whilst spotlighting, whereas Barn Owls *T. alba* were observed on every visit, Masked Owls *T. novaehollandiae* once every four visits, and Barking Owls *N. connivens* once every two visits. I suspect that further field work will prove the Rufous Owl to be common (relative to size of territory) in this area.

At the known breeding site, the male consistently roosts at the same site by day throughout the breeding season. This is a near horizontal branch, approximately 5 cm in thickness and 9 m from the ground, in a small tree 12 m tall in gallery forest. The nest site, an upright hollow of a large Paperbark *Melaleuca leucodendron*, 14 m above the ground, is approximately 25 m from this roost.

During the 1993 breeding season, the male was observed at this site on ten occasions during eleven visits (he was not seen on the 11th visit but was suspected to be roosting close by). On three occasions he was holding the remains of prey in his talons. Prey items were a Spectacled Flying-fox, an unidentified carcass which was probably a flying-fox, and a Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata*. The head of the Baza was missing. The grey breast, distinctive

rufous-brown barring on the belly, barring on the fingers on the underside of the loosely hanging wings, pale rufous under-wing coverts, lower thighs and under-tail coverts, and broad band on the undertail left no doubt that it was a Pacific Baza. This is the first published observation of Rufous Owl predation on a Pacific Baza (Schodde & Mason 1980, Estbergs & Braithwaite 1985, Hollands 1991). Some remains of a Blue-winged Kookaburra *Dacelo leachii* were found beneath the nesting tree on the same day.

On 29 September 1993, a newly fledged young was observed sitting precariously on the top foliage of a wattle *Acacia* sp., 15 m from the nest, being mobbed by approximately ten Blue-faced Honeyeaters *Entomyzon cyanotis*. Both parents were perched side by side in another wattle, 20 m from the fledgling. The male appeared to take little notice of the presence of twelve bird-watchers, but the smaller female was quite nervous and quickly departed.

Given the fledging date of *circa* 29 September, an incubation period of 37 days and fledging period of about 50 days (Hollands 1991), egg-laying would have occurred during late June or early July. This is in agreement with Lavery (1986), but differs from other publications which suggest that birds in north-east Queensland lay eggs in September and those in the Northern Territory do so in June (Schodde & Mason 1980, Hollands 1991).

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