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A NOTE ON THE AVIFAUNA OF LADY ELLIOT ISLAND

Ivan Fien

Approximately twenty-four hours were spent on Lady Elliot Island on 13th-14th November, 1971, for the purpose of observing the bird life and breeding activity on the island.

The history and geomorphology of the island have a bearing on the present bird population, and the following facts are recorded. Lady Elliot Island was discovered by the crew of the ship *Lady Elliot* in 1812, but was first charted by Lieutenant King in H.M. Cutter *Mermaid* on 28th May, 1819. An early navigator described the island as covered with vegetation five feet high and possessing great numbers of birds. The island was, however, worked for guano deposits by asiatic labour around 1899 and, in the process, the vegetation was largely destroyed and the coral surface broken up.

The island is situated in the Coral Sea at latitude $24^{\circ}6'S$ and longitude $152^{\circ}45'15''E$, and is approximately 75 km from the east coast of Queensland between Bundaberg and Gladstone. It is a Commonwealth Lighthouse Reserve and is inhabited by the light-keepers and their families. Part of the island is privately leased and the lessee's permission is required before a visit can be made.

The area of the island is approximately 45 ha (110 acres) and it is about 800 m wide at its widest point.

It is a typical low coral island surrounded by a lagoon and outer reef. Vegetation is sparse and is restricted to a few coastal she oaks (*Casuarina sp.*) and two small stands of pisonia (*Pisonia grandis*). The surface vegetation consists of maritime grasses and succulents.

Seven species of birds were recorded nesting and the details are given in the annotated species list which follows. In addition, fifteen other species, including a cuckoo and a passerine were noted. The lagoon and surrounding waters are rich in marine life and a female turtle was seen digging an incubation hole above high water mark at approximately 1430 hours* on 13th November.

WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *Puffinus pacificus*.

Several dozen birds noted around nesting burrows after dark.

BROWN BOOBY *Sula leucogaster*.

Occasional birds patrolling the lagoon and several observed by torch light roosting on the beach at night.

GREATER FRIGATE BIRD *Fregata minor*.

At least one bird visible cruising over the island most of the time, usually on the windward side. At times four birds were visible at the one time. All birds seen were females and were identified as *F. minor* by the grey throat and blue orbital ring.

WHITE-FACED HERON *Ardea novaehollandiae*.

Two birds seen inland.

REEF HERON *Egretta sacra*.

Several birds of both phases present. A pair of white phase birds were nesting in a pisonia tree. The nest

*Although Queensland introduced daylight-saving time between November 1971 and February 1972 all times printed in The Sunbird are in Eastern Standard Time.

was constructed of discarded wire!

PIED OYSTERCATCHER *Haematopus ostralegus*.

At least two birds of this species were present.

EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis dominica*.

Numerous on the air strip and other grassed areas.

LARGE SAND DOTTEREL *Charadrius leschenaultii*.

One bird noted on the beach.

WHIMBREL *Numenius phaeopus*.

Seen and heard on beach and reef.

BAR-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa lapponica*.

Approximately a dozen birds noted feeding with Golden Plover and Turnstones on the air strip. This is the first time I have noted the species feeding in a dry environment.

TATTLER *Tringa* sp. (presumably *T. brevipes*).

Two birds flushed from the reef.

TURNSTONE *Arenaria interpres*.

Extremely numerous on the air strip, other littoral coral areas, the beach and reef. By far the most common migrant wader present. I estimated the number at between 500 and 1,000.

RED-NECKED STINT *Calidris ruficollis*.

In small numbers on the air strip with other waders.

SILVER GULL *Larus novaehollandiae*.

Common on the island. I saw some evidence of predation by this species at nests, particularly in the Crested Tern colonies.

BLACK-NAPED TERN *Sterna sumatrana*.

Fairly common on the beaches, in company at times with the much less common Roseate Terns. Some *S. sumatrana*

showed a faint roseate tint on the breast.

BRIDLED TERN *Sterna anaetheta*.

Very numerous, nesting in scattered groups over much of the island where shattered coral blocks provided suitable protected ledges. These birds have different nesting habits to the very similar Sooty Tern (*S. fuscata*). They lay their single egg under an overhanging ledge of coral and do not sit closely like *S. fuscata*. They vacate the nest and fly around the intruder giving their characteristic yapping call, which is highly reminiscent of the call of the White-headed Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*. The numbers were hard to estimate because the birds were nesting in discrete groups, but certainly hundreds of nests were in use.

LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons*.

A small colony of these terns was nesting near the light house.

CRESTED TERN *Sterna bergii*.

One large, and one smaller nesting colony were noted. Unlike *S. anaetheta*, this species nested in densely packed colonies, although a few isolated outliers were present. Again, hundreds of birds were nesting, but limitations of time precluded an accurate count. Although looked for, no Lesser Crested Terns (*S. bengalensis*) were seen.

ROSEATE TERN *Sterna dougallii*.

Approximately six of these attractive terns were seen, usually in company with Black-naped Terns. Field characters noted were the bi-coloured bill with the basal two-thirds black shading to red at the tip, bright red legs, light grey mantle, white underparts, with roseate tinged breast. This latter character was particularly noticeable when the breast feathers were being preened.

COMMON NODDY *Anous stolidus*.

Approximately 100 noddys were nesting on the inland coral blocks. They were most confiding and appeared to be curious rather than afraid of human intrusion.

ORIENTAL CUCKOO *Cuculus saturatus*.

This was the most surprising sighting of all. The bird was first seen at approximately 0630 hours on 14th November, perched on a coral block. It was wary and flew from block to block and occasionally into a casuarina. It would not allow an approach closer than about 50 m, but with 8x30 binoculars, in good light, the bold ventral barring and yellow orbital ring were clearly seen. I had handled a study skin of the species three days earlier and had no doubt of the identification. I can only assume that the bird was on passage, as the island habitat would seem to be quite inimical to the species.

HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus*.

This species was observed nesting under the eaves of a building. From local information, it appears that the birds are fairly recent arrivals and were blown out from the mainland.

I should like to acknowledge the hospitality and assistance of Mr John Pope, the Head Light-keeper on Lady Elliot Island.

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FIELD NOTES ON HUNTING METHODS OF FALCONS

Greg Czechura

This article results from personal observations made during the past four years of falcons in the field, most of which have been made in south-east Queensland, although some field work has been done in western areas. Much research is required on the behaviour of these birds as it seems that the basic groups of falcons (i.e. Kestrel, Hobby, Lanner and Peregrine groups) can best be characterized by their specific hunting and other behavioural patterns.

NANKEEN KESTREL *Falco cenchroides*.

This is the most widely distributed and most commonly observed of our falcons. It inhabits open areas, especially agricultural land, where it is seen perched on high vantage points or hovering in search of reptiles, small mammals and insects. Birds are included in their diet but very few data have been gathered except for the following:

A Kestrel was observed during October 1971 to come to the nest with a Red-browed Finch (*Aegintha temporalis*). On other occasions Kestrels have been observed pursuing Pipits (*Anthus australis*) with speed and agility which would be surprising if one were accustomed to observing hovering birds only. The Pipits in all cases proved too quick for the Kestrel. Young quail are taken by Kestrels when available. The Kestrel makes long, low zig-zag paths over grassy areas in which quail are present, apparently in an attempt to flush the young into the open. Pairs of Kestrels may team together on such occasions.

Although the diet seems to be mainly grasshoppers and mice, Red-bellied Black Snakes, Bearded Dragon Lizards,

skinks, young rats, moths and butterflies have been noted as prey items. It appears that when effort is required to kill the prey, the Kestrel dives heavily instead of dropping lightly.

BROWN FALCON *Falco berigora*.

Brown Falcons occur in habitats ranging from open plains to timbered mountain areas. They can fly swiftly, especially during display when the birds will indulge in aerobatics, including fast shallow dives, side-slipping all the time and cackling incessantly. One bird during non-breeding season was observed to fly very fast near ground level over some hilly ground. The purpose of this is unknown. Brown Falcons hover like big, clumsy Kestrels as distinct from the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*). Telegraph poles and dead trees are preferred perching places.

This species preys predominantly on mammals, reptiles and large insects which are taken from a hovering position, by slow patrolling or from a perch. On only one occasion has a Brown Falcon been observed pursuing birds; in this particular instance the bird was chasing Willie Wag-tails and honeyeaters around a fig tree. Large snakes (usually Green Tree Snakes) are favourite prey. One victim was estimated by several observers as being between five and six feet long. Other prey includes various lizards, rats, mice and grasshoppers.

LITTLE FALCON *Falco longipennis*.

Most observations have been made of the western sub-species *F. longipennis murchisonianus*. Although this species frequents a wide variety of habitats it appears to prefer lightly timbered flats or low hills as hunting grounds. They also frequently hunt in gardens very near houses. One

western bird was observed making long sweeping dashes over long grass near a residential building. Little Falcons are dashing little birds which use rapid flight coupled with remarkable agility to capture prey. One bird was seen to fly at trees sheltering Cockatiel, Galah and Budgerigah until these birds fled in panic. Another spent time working flocks of Budgerigah before starting to hunt in earnest. Before making power dives to secure prey, the Falcon would chase other birds around until they reached cover or until the Falcon tired of the game and reared off. During this time it embarked on a spectacular twisting dive with a Swallow and also power dived on a pair of Ravens. Prey is caught by a dive while they are in flight, or by being rushed while perching. Little Falcons will chase birds in level flight in an attempt to make them dive, at which time they become vulnerable. If the prey manages to keep climbing it is generally safe. Many attacks appear not to be in earnest but rather are made for the enjoyment of flight, with the actual kill coming as a climax to aerobatics.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*.

Although rare in occurrence it has been observed in the same range of habitats as the Brown Falcon. The birds may be nomadic or even possibly migratory. The flight of a hunting Peregrine is very rapid and purposeful with flailing wing beats. After a successful flight the birds soar and fly leisurely.

Some birds show specialized feeding habits. A Peregrine female has been observed during two years following flocks of Lorikeets. The presence of falcons can be determined by the flock behaviour of such birds. If falcons have attacked flocks the birds tend to move in tight, thickly bunched flocks, low to the ground, when moving from tree to

tree. Like the Little Falcon, Peregrines play with other birds. In one case a Peregrine dived on and looped around a Straw-necked Ibis which threw itself around in wild evasive manoeuvres. The Peregrine made one pass and flew on leaving the Ibis obviously shaken. This was not the case when another Peregrine was observed to stoop on and strike a White Ibis to the ground. Although the outcome was never determined because of the distance involved, there are records of Peregrines killing Ibis. These cases are not common, as the Peregrine obviously prefers something which requires less effort. A Peregrine was observed for about half an hour stooping before making a kill, during which time it charged a flock of Topknot Pigeons head on, stooped at crows in trees and made numerous dives and passes. The female flew in a long shallow stoop and I could hear a rush of air through its wings as it braked and looped over to catch a small honeyeater. The power behind a dive is appreciated when one hears the wind soaring through outstretched wings as the bird pulls out of a stoop. On other occasions a female was observed eating a Lorikeet in flight; another had a quail in its talons and numerous attacks have been observed on Currawong, Crow and Magpie.

BLACK FALCON *Falco subniger*.

This species has been observed on three occasions. The first bird observed was in a locality in which quail were present in large numbers. It had a deeper, more business-like flight than Brown Falcon, and was also easily separable on its long streamlined shape and on its call. The second observation was of a bird in flight. The third was of a bird doing a series of long steep dives, levelling off, climbing and repeating from a slightly lower elevation. This species is obviously related to the Lanner Falcons by habits, shape and hunting methods.

GREY FALCON *Falco hypoleucos*.

I have not yet observed this species but predict that its hunting behaviour will be somewhat similar to that of the Peregrine Falcon.

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THE SPINY-CHEEKED HONEYEATER AS A VOCAL MIMIC

Douglas D. Dow

On 16 December 1970 at 0738 I investigated an unusual song on Boningar Station just north of the road to Glenmorgan and about 5 km west of Meandarra, Queensland. It was a quiet warbling subsong containing many mellow and liquid notes. A stealthy approach permitted a clear view of the singing bird -- a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, *Anthochaera rufogularis* -- perched about one metre above the ground in a three-metre brigalow. The warbling song continued for four minutes without pause. A sudden movement on my part disturbed the bird and it flew a short distance. It sang for a further one and one-half minutes.

The song seemed largely unstructured but contained many phrases that I considered typical of the species. However, interspersed with these were notes distinctly similar to a flight call of the Noisy Friar-bird, *Philemon corniculatus*, but even more striking were bursts of several seconds of the mellow and unmistakable rhythmic notes of the Crested Bellbird, *Oreoica gutturalis*.

The Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater seems to have been

recorded only once as a mimic, by McGill (1944:61), who heard it imitate the Grey Shrike-Thrush, *Colluricincla harmonica*, and the Olive-backed Oriole, *Oriolus sagittatus*, in north-western New South Wales. Mimicry is apparently rare among the honeyeaters, and the only other species included as a 'possible mimic' by Chisholm (1965) is the White-plumed Honeyeater, *Meliphaga penicillata*.

The prolonged singing that I heard was most likely the subsong of an immature bird. Chisholm (1965) reported that vocal imitations by the Grey Butcher-bird, *Craoticus torquatus*, were rendered in 'whisper-songs'. There is some confusion over these terms (see Thorpe, 1961: 64); careful usage favours whisper song to describe vocalizations similar in pattern to the primary song but delivered quietly without much projection. Subsong is used to describe quiet rambling, usually lengthy, songs that are quite different from the species' primary song. Possibly, the imitations of the Grey Butcherbirds were incorporated in the subsongs of immature birds. Such subsongs are typical of many passerines (Thorpe, 1961; Hinde, 1969). These are periods of singing in which the species' song is probably learned or developed. Apparently imitation of other species' songs is not unusual in the subsongs of many passerines (Thorpe, 1961, 1964; Hinde, 1969). The mimicry reported in many Australian species could then be confined to young birds, and perhaps never used by the adult after development of its species-characteristic song.

In the immediate area of my observations, Noisy Friar-birds commonly pass through daily. The Crested Bellbird, on the other hand, is rare in the region, which lies on the eastern edge of its range. But I have estimated that three or four birds inhabit the extensive brigalow regrowth

nearby, and one or two can sometimes be heard singing. The Honeyeater, therefore, would have had ample opportunity to hear the songs and calls of both species.

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BIRDS OF PREY SEEN ON A TRIP FROM BRISBANE TO CUNNAMULLA

Greg Czechura

From 21 to 24 August 1971, in the company of Chris Corben and Glen Ingram, I made a trip from Brisbane to Cunnamulla. Altogether we saw 140 species of birds. I was particularly interested in the birds of prey and present here our observations of these birds.

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE *Elanus notatus*

This species was widely distributed and encountered in most areas except between Bollon and Cunnamulla. Many adults were preparing for nesting and many juveniles were seen, often perched together in groups of up to four birds.

BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans*.

This species was not common, however we found some around Cunnamulla which were feeding on Kangaroo carcasses. At Myall Creek we got a good chance to compare their flight and underwing patterns with those of the Whistling Kite.

BLACK-BREASTED BUZZARD *Hamirostra melanosterna*

A single bird was observed soaring over trees near St. George. In some ways it appears similar to the Wedge-tailed Eagle except that it has a more compact flight silhouette, broader wings and a shorter tail.

WHISTLING KITE *Haliastur sphenurus*.

These were frequently observed especially in the vicinity of rivers and dams (e.g. at St. George). One bird was observed catching a large reptile.

BROWN GOSHAWK *Accipiter fasciatus*.

Brown Goshawks were rarely encountered. A single bird flying high caused distress among Galahs near St. George.

COLLARED SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter cirrocephalus*.

This species was seen on two occasions only; once between Bollon and Cunnamulla and once near Dalby. The birds were in flight in each instance.

LITTLE EAGLE *Hieraaetus morphoides*.

A small number were encountered, always singly. These were usually light phase individuals.

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE *Aquila audax*.

These were present in most areas and we were able to get a good look at adults in their black phase at Cunnamulla. One dead bird was seen in this area. We can not understand why this species remains unprotected in Queensland.

SPOTTED HARRIER *Circus assimilis*.

We saw only two Spotted Harriers; a brief view of one near Myall Creek and one coursing over a paddock near St. George. The plumage colouration is, in some aspects, remarkably similar to that of the inland form of the Little Falcon.

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*.

A single Peregrine Falcon was observed in flight between Dalby and Moonie.

LITTLE FALCON *Falco longipennis*.

Good observations were made of the inland form of this species near Moonie and Dalby. Its flight is more characteristic of the Peregrine Falcon rather than the Nankeen Kestrel. One of two birds seen hunting together made spectacular power dives and twisting spirals after its prey. Another bird was mobbed by a pair of Galahs. As the inland birds are much lighter in colour than the coastal form there would be no problem in identifying the sub-species where they occur together.

NANKEEN KESTREL *Falco cenchroides*.

This was the most common bird of prey. Usually they were hovering over paddocks or were perched on poles along the roadside. These birds were preparing to nest at the time.

BROWN FALCON *Falco berigora*.

These were seen occasionally in lightly timbered country bordering open fields. Light and dark phases were noted.

BARN OWL *Tyto alba*.

A dead bird was found on the roadside before we reached Dalby. Using a spotlight at night we saw another in flight near St. George.

BOOBOOK OWL *Ninox novaeseelandiae*.

This was often heard calling at night and was very common in some areas.

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NOTES ON THE NESTS OF NOISY MINER
AND PIED BUTCHER-BIRD

Alister Cameron

NOISY MINER *Myzantha melanocephala*.

Several Miners are nesting in Rilatt Park, Wavell Heights, which I visit regularly. They build any time of the year, but mostly in spring. Last year six pairs nested, possibly more. One pair had built in exactly the same spot for two years running. Another nest had a clutch of three eggs, one of them infertile. A nest found in the same tree the year before but in a different position also had an infertile egg. When they are flying with nesting material their posture differs from that of their ordinary flight. They stretch their necks out, and hold their heads up at an angle. In this way many nests have been found.

It was very rewarding while I watched one nest with three eggs, when after a while the female became bold enough to venture near me, sometimes perching less than eighteen inches above my head. As hatching time approached she began to attack me, and having lost her fear of me, she brushed me with her wings in her dives. She had two associates who assisted her in defending against intruders (including me). If they were in a neighbouring tree a few calls from the female would attract them. These two did not stay to-

gether and once when they were perched together on a branch near the nest, one was driven away by a peck from the other. Often when the female arrived at the nest to sit, the two joined her from different directions, but soon left. Occasionally they visited her on the nest, but they brought no food offering and again they soon left. It is likely that these two helped to feed the chicks.

Last year a chick was found on the ground, its parents flying constantly over it. Earlier it was being fed on a branch with its brothers and sisters. Its wings and legs were in good condition, its claws having a tendency to grip tightly anything that came within reach. It could be held upside down in this way and practically drew blood. The only apparent injury was what could have been a peck mark on the back of the head, and the fact that it always fell to one side. It ate small bits of bread, sugar (which it liked very much) and sometimes nectar from flowers held near. We carried it round to bushes and plants and let him peck at insects, but being inexperienced it missed a lot of them. A day later it began to gasp, and died.

I have now noted six nests in the park this year. The latest three were built one soon after another by different pairs, the last one still in operation in late October. The other three were spread over a longer period, from July onward.

PIED BUTCHER-BIRD *Craeticus nigrogularis*.

There were two nests in Rilatt Park this year, at opposite ends. Last year there were three, only a few trees apart. There appeared to be no territorial rights for I never saw any hostility between them. Both of this year's nests hatched chicks, but a few days later one nest was empty. There was a westerly wind and the nest was half destroyed

and I could see through it. I did notice that pair again in the park. In defence of the nest one alone usually attacks, but both take part sometimes, one usually in front and one behind. They seem to have a reasonable amount of intelligence, as shown when attacking boys. When boys are throwing stones or holding a stick above their heads the Butcher-birds do not attack, but when they relax for just a moment they are immediately attacked. As the chicks grew bigger, the birds attacked people in their back yards.

One day I watched the chicks leaving the nest. Two left together, a third staying in the nest. The two made their way to the top of the tree, then returned because the parents continued to go to the nest and feed the third chick. They would perch nearby and beg.

Once I saw a juvenile imitating bird calls. He did parrot and Miner calls and a Magpie's warble, as well as calls of his own kind, but they were muffled and soft.

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SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

THE SPINIFEXBIRD AT OPALTON

The sequel can now be written to my note in The Sunbird (1(3):64-66) on the occurrence of the Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren (*Stipiturus ruficeps*) in Queensland.

Though accepting the identification of the Striated Grass-Wren (*Amytornis striatus*) at Opalton by Mrs H.B. Gill and Miss A.C.M. Griffin (Sunbird 2(1): 6-9), I was still not satisfied that the last word had been said regarding

my claim that the unidentified bird that I had seen was in fact a Spinifexbird, *Eremiornis carteri*. In consequence, as an opportunity offered for still another visit to Opalton in September, Mrs H.B. Gill, her son Keith and myself carried out a further survey of the area.

My persistence was fully justified for this time the Spinifexbird was more obliging and we had no difficulty in identifying it. In fact our only wonder was how it had remained unobserved on the two previous visits for the birds were far from uncommon and offered splendid opportunities for observation. Probably the fact that 1970 was a year of severe drought in the area while in September 1971 the country had had a good soaking and both trees and shrubs were verdant in consequence is the answer. Both the Rufous-crowned Emu-Wren and the Striated Grass-Wren were also numerous.

The identification of the Spinifexbird in this area is a significant extension of its range in Queensland.

Brigadier H.R. OFFICER, 'Duneira', Olinda, Victoria 3788.

APOSTLE-BIRD ASSISTS PEEWEES WITH NESTING

While living alone in the School House at Watsonville (west of Herberton, North Queensland) during World War II, I adopted a lone Apostle-bird (*Struthidea cinerea*) which I called 'Uncle'. Uncle was the sole survivor of a group of Apostle-birds which, owing to the difficulties of the period, had been eaten by a neighbour. Uncle became tame enough to enter the house, especially at meal times.

At one stage some Peewees (*Grallina hypoleuca*) began building a new nest in a nearby Norfolk Pine. Uncle

interfered and began dismantling the nest using the material to repair an older one. The Peewees accepted this and used the nest. When there were four eggs in the nest Uncle persuaded the Peewees to allow him to sit on the nest during the day. In the afternoon when I returned from school, Uncle would call out and a Peewee would return to the nest to continue the incubation. When the young hatched Uncle was again involved. He was frequently seen bringing food to the young Peewees which lined up along the verandah railing.

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A PARTLY ALBINO CISTICOLA

On 21st January 1971 while riding through a paddock of long grass, an unusual bird flew off ahead of the horse and dropped again into the grass. Investigation disclosed a partly albino Cisticola (*Cisticola exilis*).

The bird had a white crown with small dark brown striations, white shoulders, a small area of white on its back; its breast was paler than the normal Cisticola but the legs and bill were the usual colour.

Whilst the bird was being followed closely for observation it picked up some thistledown and flew into a patch of grass. Here its nest and four eggs, the usual blue with small freckles, was found.

On 28th January 1971 there were only three eggs, and on 31st January three chicks very freshly out of the egg. To avoid disturbance it was not visited again until 11th February when the three young were just about ready to scamper away into the grass so a hasty retreat was made.

All was well as 'Whitey' was seen later attending well-grown young, the last sighting of the bird being on 3rd March 1971. The white was noticeably conspicuous in flight but otherwise the bird seemed much like its normally coloured mate.

Miss ELLA PRATT, Reserve Creek, Murwillumbah, N.S.W. 2484.

THE BROWN THORNBILL AT EUNGELLA
- AN EXTENSION OF RANGE

McGill (1970) gives the Dawson River as the northern limit of the range of the Brown Thornbill (*Acanthisa pusilla*). On 11th September 1971, I identified this species on the Eungella Range (21°08'S, 148°27'E), near Mackay. This is more than 200 miles north of the Dawson River. The Brown Thornbill is probably not uncommon in the Eungella region as three birds were seen (clearly and in detail) in the course of two days.

REFERENCE

McGILL, A.R. 1970. Australian Warblers. The Bird Observers Club, Melbourne.

Miss N. HOPKINS, 59 White Street, Wavell Heights, Qld. 4012.

INLAND THORNBILL - AN EXTENSION OF RANGE

Two Inland Thornbills were found by Bill Horton, Brigadier Officer, Keith Gill and myself in an area of gidgee scrub (*Acacia homalophylla*) on the MacArthur Beef Road, seven miles north of the Barkly Highway in Northern Territory (19°41'S, 135°53'E). This observation was made on 26th August

1971 and apparently increases the known range of the species (or sub-species) by a considerable distance to the north.

The RAOU Checklist ammendment of 1946 places the Inland Thornbill (formerly *Acanthiza albiventris*) as a sub-species of the Brown Thornbill (i.e. *A. pusilla albiventris*). Serventy (in Serventy and Whittell, 1967) and McGill (1970) prefer to keep separate the eastern and western members of this assemblage. Thus McGill considers the Inland Thornbill as a sub-species of the Broad-tailed Thornbill and lists it as *A. apicalis albiventris*. The distribution of the Broad-tailed Thornbill given by McGill includes "Inland Southern Queensland (the exact northern and eastern limits being little known)", and also "..... south-western Northern Territory with an isolated population in the Tanami area."

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- Mrs H.B. GILL, Mail Service 216, Innisfail, Queensland 4860.

CURLEWS IN THE TREE-TOPS

Wandering on Green Island on 29th July 1971 I heard curlews calling in the forest area. Besides the typical 'ker-lee' call of the Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*) there were occasional faint calls like those of the Stone Curlew (*Burhinus magnirostris*); harsh notes suggestive of disturbance and unlike any familiar wader cry,

and sometimes one not unlike that of the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo (*Cacatua galerita*) but less drawn-out and somewhat less raucous.

The birds, Eastern Curlews, were discovered at the top of a dead tree, seen through a gap in the branches. At first only two were visible, but others were near, calling at intervals. There was much movement and wing-flapping in two leafy tree-tops as birds moved to and from the exposed bare branches, and occasionally one would drop to the forest floor and disappear. There were at least nine birds, possibly more. It was in my experience an unusual performance for curlews. Presumably at this date they were wintering birds. They were certainly in winter plumage.

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NOTES FOR JUNIORS

Nancy Hopkins

"SCHOOL BIRD CLUBS"

Has your School a Bird Club? I have before me copies of reports from the Proston and Kalapa State School Bird Clubs. They have been doing such interesting things that I feel sure that some of our Juniors would like to have school clubs of their own. Why not ask your Teacher?

Here is a little of what the Department of Education (Agricultural Project Club Branch) has to say on the subject:

"The work of a Bird Club is the study of birds in

their environment.....Bird Club organizations shall be informal.....Each grade may have its own Bird Club under the guidance of its own teacher. There ought to be kept a Bird Log Book or Bird Record Book in which children may themselves write down what they see and think..... These Log Books are not to be kept by individuals but belong to the grade.....It shall be open to all members of a grade to make entries.....On Bird Day, Bird Clubs within a school may have an Annual Exhibition.....Reports should be submitted after celebration of Bird Day on the 3rd Friday of September each year."

The Proston State School Bird Club was in its second year in 1970. Its aims for the two years were: (i) to find out what species of birds are in the Proston district; (ii) to learn to recognize birds and to learn their habits; (iii) to know the correct names of birds; and (iv) to conserve birds as part of man's heritage.

In 1969, 100 species were located in the district, and the number was increased to 128 during 1970. The club kept a log book and nature calendar, and made record sheets which showed patterns of nesting behaviour, and the times of arrival and departure of migratory birds. There were rambles during the year and a field excursion by bus on Bird Day. On Club Day in October they had a special function, attended by parents and visiting children from neighbouring schools.

During 1971 the club carried out an interesting survey. Finding that Eastern and Crimson Rosellas were rare in their district, though listed in their bird book, they prepared survey sheets and invited several other schools in

South-East Queensland to take part. From the results, maps were made showing the distribution of Eastern, Crimson and Pale-headed Rosellas in South-East Queensland. We might be able to discuss these parrots later. The report from Kalapa State School Bird Club for May lists the birds seen that month. I was impressed by the number of birds found nesting in May, namely the Bar-shouldered Dove, Crested Pigeon, Bush-lark and Double-barred Finch.

If you have a School Bird Club, I should like to hear about your doings.

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