THE SUNBIRD
Vol. 3 No. 2

SOME ANSWERS ABOUT COUCAL NESTING

Ella Pratt

This is another report on the Coucals *Centropus phasianinus* which occupy territories on the family farm (28°21'S., 153°30'E.) about 11 kilometres east of Murwillumbah in north eastern New South Wales.

Some details of the 1970/71 summer nesting of the pair based near our home and farm buildings were set out previously (Pratt 1971); additional field observations of these parent birds were given later (Pratt 1972).

In the 1971/72 summer the first indication of a nest was obtained on 9 December 1971. This belonged to the pair using the territory near our house. They reared two broods in the season. Detailed records were kept of their activities. These have been set out below in tabular form in Table I. The age of the chicks, in days from hatching, has been used as the basis of time against development. Both chicks of both broods were banded as part of current activities under the Australian Bird-banding Scheme which is administered by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. The four bands used were numbered from 100-30414 to 100-30417; for brevity in Table I only the last three figures of each band are quoted to indicate an individual chick. Measurements of these chicks are given in Table II .

This local Coucal pair have become tame to some extent and accustomed to the presence of humans. This has facilitated observation of their domestic affairs.

TABLE I

Records of the two broods (B1 and B2) in the home territory.

Date	Days Age B1, B2	Days Ex-nest B1, B2	Notes
1971			
5 Dec	0	-	B1 hatching date as estimated from 10 Dec.
9 Dec			First indication of nest site.
10 Dec	5	-	Nest with 2 chicks found in clump of tall grass. B1 estimated at 5 days based on previous experience.
14 Dec	9	-	Growth of chicks noticeable. Both covered in long pin feathers; none broken from sheaths; also long white hair-like coverings.
16 Dec 16:30	11	0	One chick departed - other on verge of leaving. Chick in nest covered with small feathers; head still with unbroken pin feathers; wing feathers unsheathed.
17 Dec	12	1	Both B1 chicks departed by early morning.
19 Dec	14	3	Female parent watched carrying food and locating chick by calls. Area surrounded and chick caught and banded 414 on left leg. Head still had a few unbroken pin feathers.
30 Dec	25	14	Other chick caught and banded 415 on right leg. Still unable to fly. Growing new set of feathers which were about half out of their sheaths. These feathers noticeably lighter than adult breeding plumage but much darker than non-breeding adult plumage.
1972			
6 Jan	32	21	415 seen being fed by male parent.
17 Jan	43, 0	32	B2 hatching date as estimated back from 18 Feb. 415 now sole survivor of B1.
21 Jan	47, 4	36 -	415 in orange tree being fed by male parent. When tree shaken this chick flew with rather weak flight to a nearby tree.

TABLE I (Continued)

Date 1972	Days Age B1	Days Age B2	Days Ex-nest B1	Days Ex-nest B2	Notes
29 Jan	55	12	44	0	Estimated date B2 left nest.
4 Feb	61	18	50	6	Sole survivor of B1 (415) now flying well.
10 Feb					Observations indicated B2 being fed in tall grass; chicks not yet observed.
13 Feb	70	27	59	15	Male parent harassing flying young 415. When observers moved closer 415 flew into a tree. Male continued to scold observers, thus indicating that non-flying B2 chicks were in the vicinity.
18 Feb	75	32	64	20	415 still in parental territory. One B2 chick banded left leg 416. From its feathering and size 416 estimated to be 20 days out of nest and 32 days from hatching. 416 fully feathered and colour clearly lighter than breeding adults. It was tended by female parent.
20 Feb	34		22		Other chick banded right leg 417; unable to fly. 417 same colour but larger than 416. 417 tended by male parent.
29 Feb	43		31		417 being tended by male parent. When approached closely it could fly.
24 Mar	67		55		416 noticeably smaller than parents. Parents just starting to moult into non-breeding plumage.
14 Apr	88		76		Parents now attained full non-breeding plumage.

A second nesting pair of Coucals was located in January 1972. Their territory was situated on the other side of the farm from the home pair and about 1.6 kilometres to the north north-east. There are two other pairs of Coucals occupying territories in the intervening areas. In all, there are perhaps ten or twelve breeding pairs of Coucals on the farm.

This second observed nesting pair, being more isolated birds than the home pair, kept themselves under cover as a rule and were seen only briefly on three visits to their nest. The progress in the nest of their chicks was booked in detail and is set out in Table III. Great care was taken to avoid disturbance of these chicks. Records were made without handling the youngsters in order to be free of any complications owing to their leaving the nest early. The nest was approached on horseback and this avoided leaving a human scent trail for predators such as foxes and feral cats to follow.

On 19 December a close watch was kept on the female parent as she carried food to the now itinerant chick. The female moved from one vantage point to the next and each change of position was followed by a call until the young answered from the grass half-way down the hillside. She planed down immediately and received a trilling welcome. The observers gave her time to feed the chick before moving in to catch and band the young one. At their approach the parent scolded them to such a degree that she managed to distract the intruders almost to the point of their missing the chick. It was found just standing amongst the grass and was picked up before it could make a dash for better cover.

Table I makes it clear that not only is the Coucal double-brooded but also that, in this case, a second nest

was built, the eggs laid, incubated and hatched while the first brood was still being fed in the same territory.

On 13 February the surviving juvenile of the first brood was seen for the first time being repelled by the parents; it was then 70 days old and the second brood chicks were aged 27 days. Soon after 18 February when it was 75 days old, this first brood juvenile moved or was driven to the periphery of the parents' territory where it remained banished and firmly held out against re-entry. Each day in the early morning and late afternoon it could be heard calling at the boundary.

The expulsion of the juvenile started with the parent following the youngster about and making sudden rushes at it. The young one generally evaded these attacks by jumping into the air. If it then flew, the parent chased it making an angry sounding 'chuff chuffing' noise. When 100-30415 made what might well have been its last attempt to return to the natal territory, it was met by the angry male parent with his feathers ruffled and wings adroop. He snapped his bill also and made the chuffing noise. When this did not deter the youngster the male flew at it and knocked the smaller bird into the lantana. The male then stood on guard on a vantage point and called for about fifteen minutes. After this the young one seemed to keep clear and moved away.

TABLE II

Measurements of chicks in home territory

Date	Days		Band	Total		
1971	Age	Ex-nest	Number	Length	Wing	Tail
30 Dec	25	14	100-30415	9 inches	7 inches	3 inches
1972						
18 Feb	32	20	100-30416	10 "	8 "	4 "
20 Feb	34	22	100-30417	11.75"	9.5 "	4 "

TABLE III

Records from eggs to nest-leaving of brood in distant territory

Date 1972	Age Days	Chicks plumage	Other notes
20 Jan			Nest found; 3 eggs rather nest stained, thus probably well incubated.
22 Jan			3 eggs not hatched.
24 Jan			Flood conditions.
25 Jan	0		Estimated hatching.
26 Jan	1	3 chicks just balls of coarse white hairs.	All three eggs hatched, chicks very small, estimated one day old, very hungry.
29 Jan	4	No sign of any pin feathers.	3 chicks about doubled in size.
31 Jan	6	Covered in small pin feathers, wing quills about an inch long.	
3 Feb	9	Long pin feathers.	
5 Feb	11	Body pin feathers just starting to break.	
7 Feb	13	Chick 3 small feathers on body, pin feathers all unsheathed; tail feathers still partly encased; unbroken pin feathers on its head.	2 chicks now gone from nest. 3rd chick ready to move off. Great care was taken not to disturb the chick so as to avoid any early nest departure.

It seems that chicks generally leave the nest at about twelve days after hatching, with a range of eleven to thirteen days. In one known case of disturbance the three chicks left the nest at six days. Two at least are known to have survived to their seventeenth day from hatching. However, as no more was seen or heard of them, it is possible that they failed to survive.

Table III shows that the pin feathers start to show between the fifth and sixth day after hatching, also

that the young leave the nest two days after the first pin feathers start to break. The Pair 2 chicks left the nest on the thirteenth day after hatching.

Keith Hindwood published a photo of a Coucal nestling (Hindwood, 1942(a)) and stated that "long white hair-like feathers (filoplumes) protruded from the dull leaden black skin of the nestlings". Later he expanded this (Hindwood 1942(b)) by reference to a paper in "Ibis" 1900 by R. Shelford of the Sarawak Museum "in which he proved these white threads to be prolongations of the horny sheaths that envelop the developing feathers. He termed them trichoptiles. They break through the skin comparatively early in embryonic life, become aborted, and eventually disappear as the feather papillae at their bases grow and break through their sheaths."

Grateful acknowledgment is made of the help and encouragement given to me by both J.S. Robertson and his wife, of Wellington Point, in the production of these notes.

REFERENCES

HINDWOOD, K. 1942(a). Notes on the Coucal. Emu 41:249-252.

HINDWOOD, K. 1942(b). Nestling Coucal. Emu 42:52.

PRATT, E. 1971. Coucal nesting queries. Sunbird 2(3):54-56.

PRATT, E. 1972. Further notes on Coucals. Sunbird 3(1): 11-12.

Miss E. PRATT, *Reserve Creek, Murwillumbah, N.S.W. 2484.*

****

YELLOW-TINTED HONEYEATERS NEAR TOWNSVILLE

A.C.M. Griffin

Mr S.A. Parker's article on the distribution of *Meliphaga flavescens* and *M. fusca* in North Queensland (Parker 1971, Sunbird 2(3): 41-47), suggests that a colony of Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters *M. flavescens* on Palm Tree Creek near its junction with the Black River, at the foot of the Hervey Range, twenty-seven miles by road north-west of Townsville may be of interest.

I base my identification of these birds as *M. flavescens* on their calls and habitat as much as on appearance. Dr R.J. Swaby of the South Australian Ornithological Society who has tape-recorded the calls of many species, including *M. fusca*, considers that the calls of these birds are not those of *M. fusca*. Furthermore, Shane Parker's call of "porra-cheu, porra-cheu-cheu-cheu" for *M. flavescens* is a good description of one of the calls of these birds.

A species of *Tristania* grows in the bed of Palm Tree Creek, which is dry for the greater part of the year. Tall *Casuarina* forms a canopy above the *Tristania* saplings and other *Tristania*, *Acacia* and an occasional thick foliaged fruiting tree, probably a species of fig, fringe the creek. About a hundred yards away is the Black River with a few fairly permanent water holes. Here *Casuarina* and big, old *Melaleuca* predominate, with *Acacia*, *Tristania*, cockyapples and other plants along the banks. Between the creek and the river is an area of open timber comprised mainly of *Eucalyptus alba* (poplar gum) with *E. tessilaris* (Moreton Bay Ash) and the occasional iron bark (*Eucalyptus sp.*). The Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters keep mainly to the trees in the creek and along its fringes but make brief sorties into the open timber area between the creek and the river to feed in

the *E. alba* and *E. tesselaris*. They go over to the water holes in the Black River to drink and bathe, flying up into the branches over the water holes to shake and preen before flying purposefully back to the creek trees.

On 28 August, 1971 a pair were seen building a nest about ten feet up in a *Tristania* in the creek bed. On 31 August when one bird was sitting and on 9 September when they were feeding young it was possible to get a close look at the birds. The pale yellow face and area around the eye was very noticeable, also the thin straight line of brown feathers between the face and the yellow plume. The plume was a rich yellow in these breeding birds though quite pale in others. The breeding birds had only very faint ashy streaks on their breasts which were more a dull white with a yellow tint than pale yellow.

In all the birds seen there has been a great variation in the colour of the underparts, from quite streaky grey to a clear yellowish white. This is probably because this is a thriving breeding colony with many immature birds. The plumage variations were very noticeable when a party of at least twenty were watched coming and going to drink and bathe at a water hole on 7 November, 1971. Some of the young birds had not only orange gapes but spectacular bright orange bills. The yellow tinting is quite elusive depending on whether the birds are seen in sunlight or shade.

A party of six to eight of these honeyeaters was seen feeding in a flowering *Tristania* further up the Black River towards Pattersons Gorge on my first visit to this area in February 1970, and has been seen on all subsequent visits, favouring places where a thick fringe of *Acacia* or other small trees along the river bank separates the river bed from the open timber.

A similar honeyeater seen one afternoon in open timber adjacent to the Running River at Hidden Valley west of Mt Spec warrants closer inspection. I have noted this bird's call as a quiet "pee-pricka" repeated two or three times at intervals as it fed. Was this *M. fusca*? A tape recording of its early morning song and dawn calls may be a greater aid to identification than collected specimens in view of the plumage similarities of these two honeyeaters.

Miss A.C.M. GRIFFIN, *P.O. Box 1305, Townsville, Qld. 4810.*

****

THE QUEENSLAND ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY
FIRST ANNUAL BIRD COUNT

The idea of an annual bird count probably originated in America where the Christmas Count, as it is popularly called, covers North America from the Rio Grande to the Arctic and the state of Hawaii. This count is held under the auspices of the National Audubon Society and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bird count has scientific value in that it can be used to evaluate trends in abundance and range extensions. Also with so many observers out in one day there is always the chance of rare birds seen although finding rarities is not so important as counting the "ordinary" species.

The first bird count held in Australia was organised by the Bird Observers' Club, and took place in the Melbourne area on 10 December 1967. Audubon rules state that a count must not exceed the area within a 15 mile dia-

meter circle and the centre of the circle must not be moved. This ensures that the same area is covered every year. Only those birds seen the day of the census may be counted. The rules Melbourne uses are quite different from those of North America in that 30 mile diameter circles are surveyed, and as many of these circles as possible are fitted into a total survey area, 100 miles in diameter. From these the total numbers of species and individuals are calculated.

The Queensland Ornithological Society decided to adopt rules similar to those of the Bird Observers' Club for its bird count. The first Queensland count was held on 17 January 1972 in the area around Brisbane. The weather during the count was very wet, and this had an influence on the outcome; in particular, some common rain-forest species were not seen (Spine-tailed Logrunner, Red-crowned Pigeon) or appeared rather less common than usual (Brown Thornbill, White-browed Scrub-wren).

Only three circles were worked and these lay within a 100 mile diameter centred near Brisbane. These included chosen spots known for varieties of species and numbers of birds. The areas were grouped as follows:

A. North of Brisbane bordering the Brisbane River to the south, east along the coast north to the southern tip of Bribie Island and east covering the D'Aguilar Ranges: C. Corben, G. Czechura, G. Roberts.

B. East of Brisbane covering the Redlands Bay area south to the Logan River and east to North Stradbroke Island: D. & A. Dow, B. & J. Morgan, D.Watson.

C. South of Brisbane from Waterford to the Tamborine Mts and east to the Gold Coast: P. & D. Dawson, I. & S. Reynolds, J. Ebblinghaus, R. Perry.

LIST OF SPECIES

Species	A	B	C	Total
Little Grebe	20	22	16	58
Black Cormorant	0	13	0	13
Little Black Cormorant	6	0	5	11
Pied Cormorant	15	13	1	29
Little Pied Cormorant	10	9	15	34
Darter	0	1	2	3
White-faced Heron	28	57	17	102
Mangrove Heron	1	0	3	4
Cattle Egret	50	2	0	52
White Egret	12	5	4	21
Little Egret	5	2	1	8
Plumed Egret	6	2	8	16
Jabiru	2	3	1	6
White Ibis	40	32	75	147
Straw-necked Ibis	4	9	14	27
Glossy Ibis	0	0	2	2
Royal Spoonbill	8	7	4	19
Black Swan	30	1	58	89
Black Duck	150	62	94	306
Chestnut Teal	210	6	0	216
Grey Teal	20	2	4	26
White-eyed Duck	10	0	6	16
Wood Duck	0	0	10	10
Musk Duck	1	0	1	2
Black-shouldered Kite	5	0	0	5
Red-backed Sea Eagle	3	0	1	4
Whistling Kite	3	4	2	9
Wedge-tailed Eagle	0	1	0	1
White-breasted Sea Eagle	5	0	2	7
Swamp Harrier	1	0	0	1
Osprey	1	1	0	2
Peregrine Falcon	1	0	0	1
Nankeen Kestrel	4	3	6	13
Brush Turkey	2	0	1	3
Brown Quail	3	0	3	6
King Quail	0	0	3	3
Painted Quail	1	0	1	2
Brolga	1	0	0	1
Banded Landrail	1	0	0	1
Marsh Crake	0	2	0	2
Swamphen	21	2	198	221
Dusky Moorhen	30	10	82	122
Coot	20	2	88	110
Jacana	4	7	14	25
Pied Oystercatcher	0	52	0	52
Spur-winged Plover	40	20	46	106
Golden Plover	51	32	0	83

Species	A	B	C	Total
Red-capped Dotterel	300	20	7	327
Mongolian Dotterel	50	150	0	200
Large Sand Dotterel	0	3	0	3
Black-fronted Dotterel	3	2	7	12
Whimbrel	0	100	1	101
Eastern Curlew	20	81	6	107
Black-tailed Godwit	200	0	0	200
Bar-tailed Godwit	70	200	0	270
Little Greenshank	3	2	0	5
Greenshank	1	10	7	18
Wood Sandpiper	1	0	0	1
Terek Sandpiper	0	150	0	150
Common Sandpiper	0	1	0	1
Grey-tailed Tattler	1	18	16	35
Turnstone	22	20	0	42
Japanese Snipe	0	0	8	8
Knot	150	0	0	150
Great Knot	100	25	0	125
Red-necked Stint	800	200	6	1006
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	200	30	5	235
Curlew Sandpiper	200	8	0	208
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1	6	0	7
White-headed Stilt	20	48	2	70
Skua (species unidentified)	1	0	0	1
Silver Gull	100	54	0	154
White-winged Black Tern	200	0	0	200
Caspian Tern	0	2	1	3
Little Tern	50	106	0	156
Crested Tern	5	0	0	5
Asiatic Common Tern	3	0	0	3
Wompoo Pigeon	4	0	0	4
Topknot Pigeon	20	0	0	20
White-headed Pigeon	15	0	0	15
Brown Pigeon	10	0	2	12
Spotted Turtledove	10	7	6	23
Bar-shouldered Dove	8	1	2	11
Peaceful Dove	4	7	7	18
Green-winged Pigeon	1	0	0	1
Common Bronzewing	0	0	4	4
Crested Pigeon	0	9	30	39
Wonga Pigeon	1	0	0	1
Rainbow Lorikeet	0	2	45	47
Scaly-breasted Lorikeet	0	17	33	50
Little Lorikeet	0	14	5	19
Galah	0	5	3	8
Cockatiel	0	0	2	2
King Parrot	12	0	2	14
Crimson Rosella	10	0	6	16
Pale-headed Rosella	3	15	50	68

Species	A	B	C	Total
Eastern Rosella	10	0	0	10
Brush Cuckoo	6	3	0	9
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	1	0	0	1
Koel	0	2	2	4
Pheasant Coucal	3	2	7	12
Tawny Frogmouth	0	0	1	1
Spine-tailed Swift	0	12	17	29
Azure Kingfisher	0	1	2	3
Laughing Kookaburra	8	3	21	32
Forest Kingfisher	1	3	3	7
Sacred Kingfisher	10	27	27	64
Mangrove Kingfisher	1	2	2	5
Rainbow Bee-eater	8	5	26	39
Dollarbird	20	10	10	40
Welcome Swallow	65	130	64	159
Tree Martin	80	0	1	81
Fairy Martin	50	50	91	191
Australian Pipit	10	6	14	30
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	12	7	14	33
Cicada-bird	6	2	1	9
Grey-crowned Babbler	0	0	5	5
Tailor-bird	60	16	19	95
Little Grassbird	3	0	0	3
Tawny Grassbird	2	1	2	5
Reed Warbler	0	5	0	5
Superb Blue Wren	0	0	7	7
Red-backed Wren	4	3	2	9
Variegated Wren	5	5	7	17
White-throated Warbler	0	2	3	5
Brown Warbler	30	0	0	30
Mangrove Warbler	5	2	12	19
Striated Thornbill	20	0	0	20
Little Thornbill	1	2	6	9
Brown Thornbill	0	5	0	5
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	0	0	4	4
White-browed Scrub-wren	3	1	0	4
Yellow-throated Scrub-wren	20	0	0	20
Large-billed Scrub-wren	10	0	2	12
Weebill	0	0	6	6
Rose Robin	1	0	0	1
Southern Yellow Robin	10	1	0	11
Pale Yellow Robin	10	0	0	10
Grey Fantail	20	1	4	25
Rufous Fantail	3	0	0	3
Willie Wagtail	20	16	23	59
Leaden Flycatcher	0	3	4	7
Restless Flycatcher	0	0	1	1
Black-faced Flycatcher	5	0	0	5

Species	A	B	C	Total
Golden Whistler	5	0	0	5
Rufous Whistler	0	4	2	6
Grey Shrike-thrush	4	3	8	15
Shrike-tit	2	0	0	2
Eastern Whipbird	20	0	3	23
White-headed Sittella	10	0	4	14
White-throated Tree-creeper	5	4	0	9
Mistletoe Bird	5	1	1	7
Spotted Pardalote	1	1	0	2
Black-headed Pardalote	0	1	4	5
Grey-breasted Silvereye	21	15	14	50
Brown Honeyeater	0	7	2	9
Striped Honeyeater	0	0	4	4
Scarlet Honeyeater	3	0	0	3
Lewin Honeyeater	20	6	2	28
Mangrove Honeyeater	2	1	2	5
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	0	1	0	1
White-throated Honeyeater	0	2	2	4
Eastern Spinebill	5	0	0	5
Bell Miner	10	0	0	10
Noisy Miner	4	2	30	36
Little Wattle-bird	0	0	4	4
Blue-faced Honeyeater	0	0	5	5
Noisy Friar-bird	0	2	6	8
Little Friar-bird	1	0	7	8
Banded Finch	1	18	4	23
Spice Finch	5	18	0	23
Chestnut-breasted Finch	0	4	2	6
Red-browed Finch	7	2	0	9
House Sparrow	100	66	12	178
Goldfinch	0	2	0	2
Starling	23	220	131	374
Olive-backed Oriole	1	1	0	2
Southern Figbird	5	2	1	8
Spangled Drongo	3	0	0	3
Magpie Lark	50	52	84	186
White-breasted Wood-swallow	0	3	1	4
Dusky Wood-swallow	0	0	1	1
Pied Currawong	10	0	11	21
Pied Butcherbird	2	12	18	32
Grey Butcherbird	2	1	1	4
Black-backed Magpie	20	14	84	118
Catbird	5	0	0	5
Regent Bower-bird	1	0	0	1
Satin Bower-bird	12	0	0	12
Paradise Rifle-bird	1	0	0	1
Australian Crow	30	20	39	89
Total Individuals	4,343	2,510	1,951	8,804
Total Species	144	120	122	191

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

THE RUFOUS-CROWNED EMU-WREN, *STIPITURUS RUFICEPS*, IN QUEENSLAND

In discussing the eastern limits of distribution in Australia of *Stipiturus ruficeps*, A.R. McGill (1970:51) states, "Its range extends eastward to the south-western portion of the Northern Territory and extreme north-western South Australia." Recent observations by ornithologists and now the first specimens to hand taken in Queensland extend the known range considerably to the east.

During a recent field trip to western Queensland by three members of the Queensland Museum staff, two specimens of *S. ruficeps* were collected by A. Hiller at Standish Range on Buckingham Downs Station, (21°45'S, 139°45'E) which is about 125 kilometres north of Boulia, western Queensland. These were prepared as cabinet skins.

The specimens confirm the 1969 sightings made by E.M. Tucker who first recorded the birds 100 kilometres south of Winton at Opalton (Tucker, 1969) and those of H.R. Officer who with Mrs H.B. Gill confirmed the sightings of the birds in the same area (Officer, 1970). Since then, birds have been seen at a point 31 kilometres south of Winton by A.C.M. Griffin (Griffin, 1971).

MATERIAL

Q.M.011683, adult male, 25 July 1971, skull completely ossified, gonads not enlarged (2x1.5mm). Habitat spinifex, *Triodia* sp. on gibber plain at foot of range. Total length 119mm, wingspan 121mm, wing 39mm, tarsus 16mm, culmen 8.3mm, tail 60mm and weight 6.6 g. Iris colour brown; upper mandible very dark grey, lower mandible the same but paler at base; tarsus and toes

reddish brown. A. Hiller described the call as "a soft tinkling".

Q.M.011684, immature male, 24 July 1971, skull unossified, gonads very small (1x0.5mm). Habitat spinifex, *Triodia* sp. near creek with pool. Total length 109mm, wing-span 125mm, wing 39mm, tarsus 16mm, culmen 7.5mm, tail 45mm and weight 6.5 g. Iris colour brown; upper and lower mandibles dark brown; tarsus and toes yellowish flesh. A. Hiller described the call as "a very soft tinkling call, *Malurus*-like and hardly audible".

Specimen Q.M.011683 agrees closely with the description of an adult male by Mathews (1922-23) and specimen Q.M.011684, the immature male, resembled his description of a nestling but is paler dorsally and has only two tail feathers, neither of which are fully developed.

These two cabinet skin specimens from the Standish Range extend the known range of the species in Queensland. As spinifex country in western Queensland is patchy but widespread, it seems likely that *S. ruficeps* may be found in many other areas.

REFERENCES

GRIFFIN, A.C.M. 1971. More Observations at Opalton. Sunbird 2:6-9.

MATHEWS, G.M. 1922-23. The Birds of Australia. p.146-7.

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

OFFICER, H.R. 1970. Rufous-crowned Emu-wren, *Stipiturus ruficeps*, A New Queensland Species. Sunbird 1:64-66.

TUCKER, E.M. 1969. The Bird Observer. p.5. Melbourne: The Bird Observers Club.

Mr D.P. VERNON, *Queensland Museum, Fortitude Valley, Qld.4006.*

****

SOME WADER OBSERVATIONS IN TOWNSVILLE AND DISTRICT

Black-tailed Godwit .... *Limosa limosa*	August 7/71 at least 20 at Jerona.* Not seen a week later.
Avocet ..... *Recurvirostra novae-hollandiae*	August 14/71 a lone bird at Jerona. Not seen next day. The only other sighting by myself in the Townsville area was 12 birds on 23.2.69 at the Mt St John lagoon, a few birds remaining until 7.3.69.
Little Greenshank ..... (Marsh Sandpiper) *Tringa stagnatilis*	September 8/71 one lone bird on water hole on Townsville Town Common.
	October 17/71 at Jerona between 20 and 30.
Greenshank ..... *Tringa nebularia*	October 17/71 at Jerona 20 or more.
	January 22/72 at Townsville Town Common 40-50 resting on edge of lagoon.
Eastern Curlew ..... *Numenius madagas-cariensis*	October 17/71 Jerona 21 birds feeding together.
	January 1/72 Townsville Town Common 7 flying over flooded area.
Broad-billed Sandpiper . *Limicola falcinellus*	October 17/71 Jerona single bird, with 6 Curlew Sandpipers. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers (*Calidris acuminata*) also very numerous that day.
Wood Sandpiper ..... *Tringa glareola*	March 14/71, five on Gainey's Swamp, Ingham Road, Townsville.
	February 15/72, two feeding with 11 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers on muddy edge of Gainey's Swamp, Ingham Road, Townsville.

*Jerona is a Fauna Reserve 35 miles (56 kilometres) south of Townsville and the waders have all been seen on an extensive fresh water lagoon from which salt water has been excluded by the construction of an earth-bank dam.

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS.

Arctic Skua ..... *Stercorarius parasiticus*	Picked up dead on 1.1.72 about 10.30 a.m. near tidal salt flats on Townsville Common. It had a broken neck but was otherwise undamaged and had not been dead long.
Masked Plover ..... *Vanellus miles*	A nest on Townsville Town Common 16.1.72 with six eggs. A nest in almost exactly the same place on 21.11.70 had only four eggs and all others previously seen have only had four. Is six unusual?
Pied Heron ..... *Ardea picata*	Three seen on 15/1/72 in sparsely leafed *Melaleuca* on edge of flooded area of Townsville Town Common. One which took the lead when they flew had a plume on the crown, one had a dark crown but no plume and the third had much less black on the crown, mostly grey, suggesting they were parents with a young bird. A single Pied Heron was seen again on 18.2.72.

This is the only time I have seen the Pied Heron in the Townsville area during the five years I have been here. It has been recorded before by Hugh Lavery and Nancy Hopkins (Lavery H.J. and N. Hopkins, 1963. Birds of the Townsville District of North Queensland. Emu 63:242-252). Their comments were "Rare. Family of three on swamp near Townsville, January 1951. Other isolated records." It would be interesting to know if these other records also coincided with cyclonic weather.

Miss A.C.M. GRIFFIN, *P.O. Box 1305, Townsville, Qld. 4810.*

****

A SIGHT RECORD OF THE DUNLIN AT CAIRNS

At approximately 15.30 on 10 December 1971, a party consisting of Mr Bill Anderson of California, my wife and I, were observing waders from the Esplanade at Cairns, when several Dunlin *Calidris alpina* were observed.

The birds were first noted as something different amongst Curlew Sandpipers *Calidris ferruginea*, Sharp-tailed Sandpipers *C. acuminata*, and Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus*. After close examination in good light with a 25 x 60 prismatic telescope mounted on a tripod at approximately 25m, the following field notes were taken:

Size:	Approximately that of Curlew Sandpiper but with shorter legs, giving squat appearance.
Bill:	Length between that of Curlew Sandpiper and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, but decurved at tip only.
Plumage:	Mottled grey on back and breast, pale supercilliary stripe, dark rump in flight.

In general, the birds were superficially similar to Curlew Sandpipers, but were set apart from that species by the more mottled plumage, squat appearance, and bill decurved only at the distal end. The dark rump is diagnostic of the species, and was the final point noted in identifying the birds.

Mr IVAN FIEN, *61 Highlands Street, Wavell Heights, Q.4012.*

****

BRIDLED, SOOTY AND COMMON TERNS AT TOWNSVILLE

On 10 January 1972 in the wake of Cyclone Bronwyn dark winged terns were noticed hawking over Ross Creek behind the Townsville General Post Office. Closer study showed them to be Bridled Terns *Sterna anaetheta* and Sooty Terns *S. fuscata*. Briefly a Bridled Tern joined a Sooty Tern resting on a bollard allowing a closer view and a comparison of the white forehead markings, and the browner black of the Bridled's back and wings, compared with the sooty black of the Sooty's.

It was hard to count the birds as they hawked for insects but it seemed there were about eight to twelve Bridled Terns and only about four Sooty Terns. The staccato little "yuk yuk" bark of the Bridled Terns was heard but the Sooty Terns did not give their distinctive call at all. With those birds were possibly twenty or more Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* as well as the usual Crested Terns *S. bergii*, Lesser Crested Terns *S. bengalensis* and Little Terns *S. albifrons*.

On 12 January 1972 the Common Terns had gone and no Sooties were seen. Two Bridleds stayed on for the next few days but they too had gone on 15 January. However, the following day, a Saturday, two were seen resting on the tidal salt flats on the Town Common north of the city around 10:00. None have been seen since.

Three dead birds, either Bridled or Sooty Terns, were found among mangroves on coastal sand dunes at the southern end of Halifax Bay, north of Townsville on 19 March 1972. They were intact skeletons with only wing and tail feathers left. The rather brown/black feathers rather than sooty/black suggested that they too were Bridled Terns. These birds were possibly cyclone casualties.

Miss A.C.M. GRIFFIN, *P.O. Box 1305, Townsville, Qld. 4810.*

****

A NEST OF THE JABIRU

Having recently moved from South Australia to Queensland I found myself at a considerable disadvantage with entirely new habitats to cope with, new birds to be seen and many new calls to be learnt. In an effort to overcome the habitat and environment disadvantage I used an aircraft to fly over a considerable area of country between Brisbane and the New South Wales border, which enabled me to gain a mental picture of the lie of the land. During the flight I asked the pilot to fly low over many of the innumerable swamps and mangrove areas in order to guage the potential for water birds.

While flying low over a swamp on Stradbroke Island I noted ahead a large nest on top of a low tree and immediately thought that it may have been the nest of a Jabiru *Xenorhynchus asiaticus*. A few moments later a pair of Jabiru came into sight, standing in the swamp by the tree. As we passed they took flight. We circled and I could see that the nest was in excellent condition, on top of a small teatree. I noted the position and returned six weeks later. A Jabiru was seen brooding and as we again circled it rose to its feet revealing three eggs. It remained on the nest little disturbed by the plane, merely rising to its feet as we passed by, at times at an altitude of little more than ten metres, and settling back onto the eggs as soon as we had passed.

The following day I returned to the nest by car, boat and on foot and found that this pair of Jabirus had maintained the species' tradition of siting their nests in a distant portion of a remote swamp. It was necessary to cover approximately 20 kilometres on foot to reach the nest, some two kilometres of which were through swamp.

Two friends and I, working in relays, took two and three-quarter hours to cover the one kilometre through the swamp to the nest and a further three-quarters of an hour to retrace our path back to the shore. The swamp was surprisingly devoid of other bird life. We saw only one Golden-headed Fantail-warbler *Cisticola exilis* and heard no calls other than those of the Brown Honeyeater *Lichmera indistincta* and Noisy Friar-bird *Philemon corniculatus* from teatree by the edge of the swamp. The nest was a substantial structure placed three metres above water level on the top of a small teatree growing in approximately 60 centimetres of water, in a swamp densly overgrown with cutting rush, reeds and other vegetation. Construction was of fine sticks of varying lengths, many a metre or more long, laid over the top of the tree and tramped down into a platform, two metres by 1.3/4 metres by approximately 50 cantimetres deep. It was almost flat on top and overlaid by a layer of dried reed flags, grasses and other similar dried vegetation, some 15 to 20 centimetres thick. An interesting feature was two hollows moulded into this layer one to either side of the centre along the longer axis. One hollow held the eggs apparently well incubated, while the other was empty. It is of interest to conject whether or not the empty hollow was the previous years brood site or alternatively was used by the non-brooding bird at night. I favour the latter, for several reasons.

(a) When we arrived at the edge of the swamp both birds were on the nest, apparently sitting. One stood up and left shortly thereafter.

(b) The whole layer of lining material appeared to be fresh and new.

(c) The unoccupied hollow was neat and clean.

(d) If the unoccupied hollow was from the previous years (or for that matter a more recent brood, which is

unlikely, for it was May) it would almost certainly have been flattened by the activities of the young during the nestling stage, and their parents, and later by the weather.

The brooding bird remained on the nest until we were within 25 metres. However it watched us from the time we entered the swamp and flattened itself lower and lower onto the nest the closer we approached. When it decided to leave it rose slowly on its long red legs, looked at us for a moment, then flew off to a large tree on a hillside a considerable distance away. It returned to the nest shortly after we left and long before we reached the edge of the swamp.

One feature of particular interest near the nest was an area of rushes, reed and other vegetation tramped down to form a solid platform over the water, some of it strong enough to take the weight of the three of us without sinking below the water level. In the centre of this area there was a "well" neatly "cut" through the vegetation into the clear water below and the area of water below cleared of all debris. This was almost certainly prepared by the Jabiru as a drinking well for the swamp was so thickly overgrown that the water was totally hidden beneath the vegetation. The edge of the vegetation around the hole gave the impression of having been cleanly cut and the hole through the growth was round, approximately 80 centimetres across.

Mr G.R. BERULDSEN, *"Pondalowie", 18 Caber Street, Kenmore, Qld. 4069.*

****

REQUEST FOR SIGHTINGS OF YELLOW-TUFTED HONEYEATERS IN QUEENSLAND

The discovery of a few colonies of Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters *Meliphaga melanops* in recent years, some in regions threatened with clearing or suburban development, has stimulated interest in mapping the species' range in as much detail as possible. This will provide a basis for future studies of dispersal or changes of range.

I would be grateful for details of sightings of the species anywhere in Queensland.

Dr DOUGLAS D. DOW, *Department of Zoology, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, Qld. 4067.*

****

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON BELL MINERS

The Bell Miner *Manorina melanophrys* Mapping Survey is one of the member groups of the Victorian Ornithological Research Group, and has been mapping Bell Miner colonies around metropolitan Melbourne. A general map has been produced based on the first part of the survey done in 1970 and these recorded colonies are being checked in 1972.

Information on colonies in other areas well away from the Melbourne region is wanted for comparison. Of particular interest are changes in status of the birds since civilization has made an impact on the habitat and for this reason information is sought on the histories of individual colonies - when they originated (if known), fluctuations in numbers and size of area, extensions of range and complete loss of colonies.

If any reader can provide any data at all in this general area the group would be most grateful. Further information or forms for General Records are available from the Convenor.

Mrs ELLEN M. McCULLOCH, *Convenor Bell Miner Survey V.O.R.G., 6 Bullen Ave., Mitcham, Victoria 3132.*

****