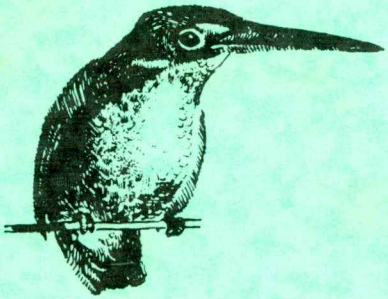
AUSTRALIAN BIRDS



Journal of the
N.S.W. FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS CLUB

Vol. 14, No. 3 March, 1980

ISSN 0311–8150

Registered for Posting as a Periodical – Category B

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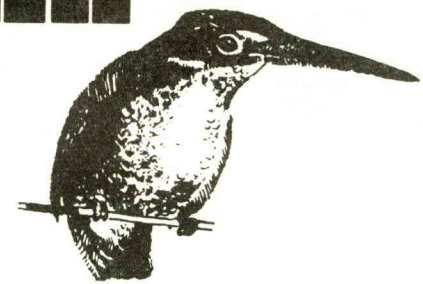

Vol. 14, No. 3 March, 1980

A REVIEW ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SUPERB PARROT IN CENTRAL NEW SOUTH WALES

N. W. SCHRADER

INTRODUCTION

J. M. Forshaw (1969) gives the range of the Superb Parrot *Polytelis swainsonii* as the interior of northern and southern New South Wales and northern Victoria, stating also that there appeared to be two populations completely isolated. Further authors have reinforced this belief in two separate populations i.e. H. J. Frith Ed. (1969), P. Slater (1970), A. H. Lendon (1973), H. T. Condon (1975), and H. J. Frith Ed. (1976). However, A. R. McGill (1960) makes no mention of this fact.

None of the authors make any reference to there being observations in the central region between the two populations. Forshaw *(loc. cit.)* quotes from an unpublished manuscript of J. H. Calaby, who travelled between the Lachlan and Macquarie Rivers but had not seen the Superb Parrot after leaving Cowra or before reaching the Macquarie River to the north-east of Trangie. Calaby was quoted as saying that he lived at Dubbo for a number of years and travelled throughout the district without sighting the species.

This apparent lack of knowledge of the occurrence of the Superb Parrot in the central-western region between the Macquarie and the Lachlan Rivers has prompted me to review its distribution and provide evidence that the parrots occur in this area.

DISTRIBUTION

Since moving to Parkes in late 1975, I have observed the Superb Parrot over a wide area of the central region between the two supposedly isolated populations. Locations where observations have been made include –Cookamidgera; west of Alectown; between Parkes and Euabalong West along the railway line; Tichborne; along the railway between Bogan Gate and Tottenham; and between Parkes and Trangie.

J. D. Woodhouse *(pers. comm.)* has observed the species in the Parkes district since he arrived here in 1951 and M. T. Kaveney (1979) observed the species at Albert, near Tottenham for a number of years.

Other observers have also recorded the species in this region i.e. at Goonumbla (Wheeler 1972) and Gooloogong (Rogers 1973), this last record was presumed to be a 10 km extension of the southern population. Rogers (1977) likewise presumed an observation 12 km south-west of Trangie as probably the southern limit of distribution for the northern population.

The distribution in the southern part of this State has been adequately covered by H. J. Frith and J. H. Calaby (1953) in their paper on the Superb Parrot and therefore I will confine my comments to the central and northern limits of the parrot's distribution.

A search of literature has revealed other records which further clarify the distribution of this species. The R.A.O.U. Campout at Round Hill Nature Reserve, near Mt Hope recorded the species (Wheeler 1974) and Wheeler also lists them for Lake Cargelligo. There also exists a record of a flock of four adults between Hillston and Booligal (Frith and Calaby 1953) and for Goolgowi and Rankin Springs (Wheeler 1969).

In the Orange District they were recorded at Borenore for a few months in 1968 (S. J. Heron 1973a).

In north-western New South Wales, A. K. Morris *(pers. comm.)* observed eight near Narrabri on 29 July 1970; five birds near Hermidale in July 1973 and another flock of 22, 12 km north of Hermidale in June 1978; three near Tooraweenah on 5 July 1975; and two 12 km south-east of Ulamambri on 22 March 1979. A. O. McCutcheon (A. Morris *pers. comm.*) who lives 14 km west of Gilgandra has recorded them each year since 1935 around his property, and at Gin Gin, Gilgandra and Gulargambone in the period April-August.

D. Johnson who lived at Bilambil, 14 km west of Baradine has recorded them in May-August, in the Baradine – Terridgerie area most years that he resided there 1945-1978.

G. Haddon when residing west of Gulargambone saw the bird regularly during the winter months but after he moved to Quambone in 1976-1979 failed to record them locally. There are many observations at Narromine, Trangie and Warren published in literature, all for the period April-August.

W. R. Wheeler *(loc. cit.)* also records the species at Lightning Ridge, an exceptionally northern locality, possibly based on an observation by P. A. Bourke.

The species does not appear to occur east of Narromine, on the Macquarie River. Calaby (Forshaw *loc. cit.*) never observed them at Dubbo, nor did S. J. Heron (1973b) for the Goonoo State Forest to the north of Dubbo.

HABITAT IN CENTRAL WEST

Whenever the Superb Parrot is encountered in the central-western region, the associated habitat has been Savannah Woodland. The main Eucalyptus species associated with this habitat are Bimble Box *E. populnea*, White Gum *E. blakelyi*, Yellow Box *E. melliodora* and along the watercourses, the River Red Gum *E. camaldulensis*. According to A. K. Morris (*pers. comm.*) the Narrow-leafed Box *E. woollsiana*, is important in the north of the central region.

This Woodland habitat which is flanked by Ironbark/Cypress Pine in the east over 300 m, a.s.l. stretches from Cowra in the south to the Macquarie River east of Narromine. In this area the River Red Gum is still to be found along the major watercourses giving way to the River Oak *Casuarina cunninghamiana* on the slopes. In the west, the woodland is flanked by Mallee/Cypress Pine. Savannah woodland is also found in areas west of Bulbodney Creek, near Tottenham, and along the higher ground which separates the different watersheds of the Bogan and Lachlan Rivers. To the south this woodland extends to West Wyalong, the main break being the Lachlan River. The vegetation association which separates the Lachlan, Bogan and Bulbodney watersheds consists of Cypress Pine *Callitris glauca* and a number of Acacias and minor Mallee species.

The Superb Parrot is usually to be encountered near blossoming Eucalyptus or on the edge of roads or railway lines searching for grain. When feeding on flowering eucalyptus, the bird pulls the whole blossom off, chews it up, then discards them. The ground around such trees becomes covered in the remains of blossom. It has also been observed to feed extensively on the seeds of Yarran *Acacia homalophylla*.

When feeding and roosting in the tops of eucalyptus, Suberb Parrots are quiet and plumage blends into the foliage making them easy to overlook. Only when the birds emit a low twitter can they be found, this is particularly true when resting in the middle of the day. I have found that they can be approached quite closely, when they are feeding.

A large flock (130+) which was west of Alectown, roosted in the same patch of Bimble Box woodland for several months, the birds dispersing by day in small flocks into surrounding country in search of blossom or grain.

The Superb Parrot is sometimes found in intermixed flocks of Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus*. In flight the Superb Parrot and Cockatiel have the same flight silhouette, which makes identification at a distance difficult.

I have not found any evidence of breeding within the Parkes district, though Woodhouse *(pers. comm.)* observed pairs investigating holes in Yellow Box in September/October 1951 near Bogan Gate.

MOVEMENT

The Superb Parrot is generally regarded as nomadic, being present whenever eucalyptus are in flower. Kaveney *(loc. cit.)* believed he observed a southward movement in the years 1966-1969 when he resided at Albert.

It is interesting to note that during my search of literature, all the records for the believed northern population were for observations between the months of March-August, whilst those for the southern, between September-April.

Ornithologists residing on the Namoi/Bogan/Macquarie/Castlereagh Rivers know this species as a winter visitor between March-August and published records referred to earlier in this paper appear to support this view. The alleged "northern population" referred to by Forshaw *(loc. cit.)* would appear to be nothing more than a winter migratory movement. A. O. McCutcheon claims that the 19th April is the most usual date when flocks appear each autumn west of Gilgandra (A. Morris *pers. comm.*).

R. Sharrock observed a flock at Temora in March of 16 birds (Buckingham 1978a) then again in April of over 200 (Buckingham 1978b), could this second record have been an instance of pre-migratory flocking?

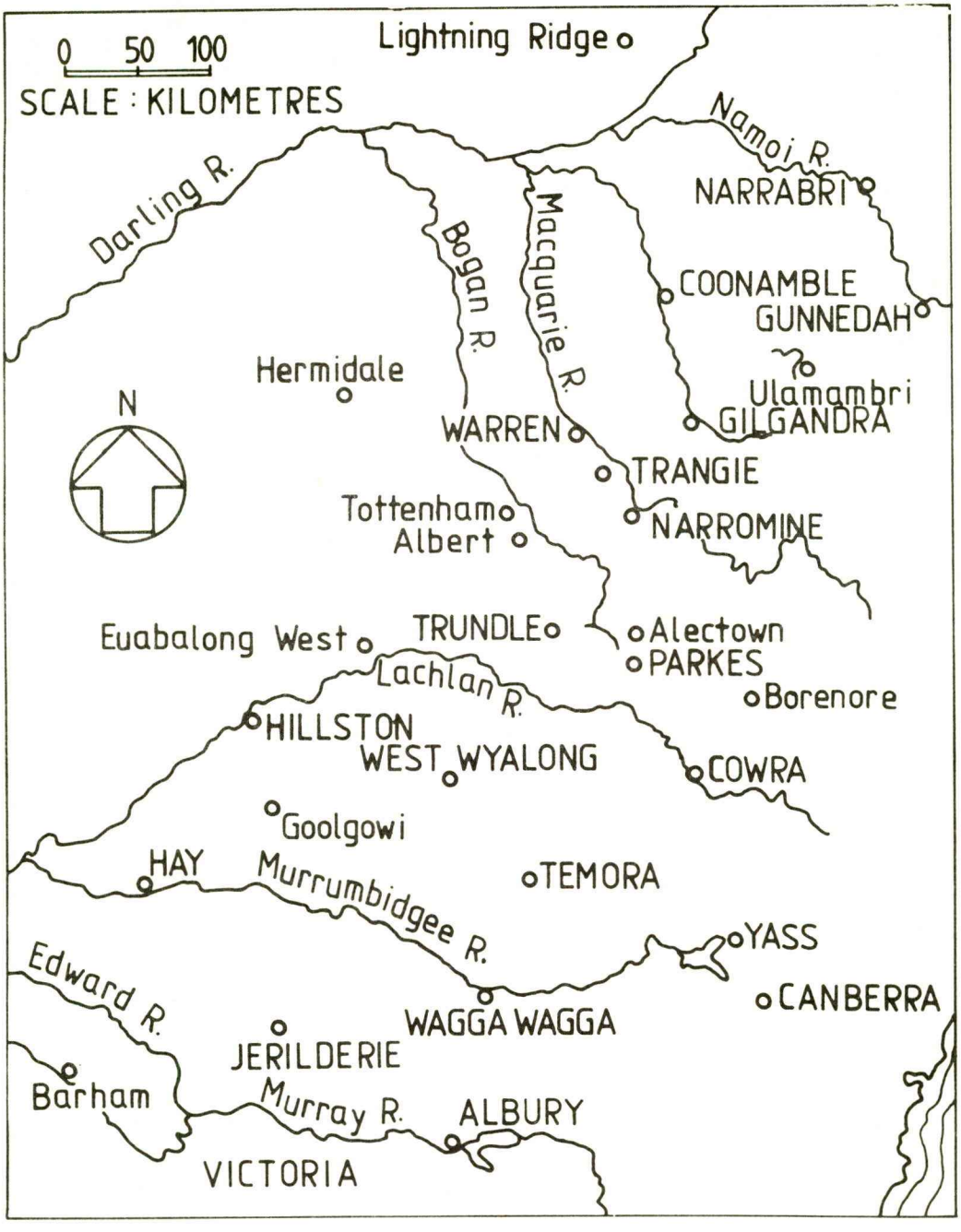

Fig. 1 Map of central-western New South Wales showing towns and major river systems.

In the Parkes area there appears to be a small nomadic resident population, with an influx occurring in the winter months. I have recorded them in the months of May, June, July, August, September, November and December. They are most common in June-August, flocks numbering in size between 10-30, with occasionally larger flocks of 100+ being encountered in the winter months.

There appears to be no set route that the Superb Parrot follows in this movement, for example, in 1976, the birds were frequently observed between Cookamidgera and Bogan Gate but in 1977 they were encountered more towards Tottenham, moving north. Possibly the route that the species adopts is influenced by the availability of blossom. The actual number of birds appears to fluctuate yearly, no doubt the speed of the movement north could also depend on the amount of blossom available. This would explain why in some years during winter months the parrots can be quite common in this region, but in other years quite scarce.

I have not observed any return movement and possibly the return is more direct due to the non-availability of food and the approach of the breeding season.

It is interesting to note that the movements I have observed in the autumn months have been of a northward direction whereas Kaveney *(loc. cit.)* recorded in the years 1965-1969 a southward movement in the months of June-July.

CONCLUSION

From the data presented in this paper, it appears as though the Superb Parrot in New South Wales can be encountered within the following boundaries, WEST Barham, Hay, Hillston, Hermidale, Coonamble and Lightning Ridge, EAST from Albury, Canberra, Borenore, Narromine, to Gunnedah and Narrabri. The distribution takes in the major rivers and tributaries of the Murray, Murrumbidgee, Lachlan, Bogan, Castlereagh and Namoi. See Fig. 1.

There appears to be evidence of a north and south local movement each autum and a return each spring, this movement consisting of part if not all the population.

This parrot appears to be ecologically restricted to the Savannah Woodland habitat.

Frith and Calaby *(loc. cit.)* believed the species' future was secure because much of the southern part of New South Wales had been settled for some time. Since their paper was published, some 27 years ago, a number of changes have occurred. The species' habitat is now under pressure due to widespread clearing for cultivation and this has been accelerated in the last few years since the lifting of wheat quotas; the development of new types of grains; and the concept of broad-acre farming.

There is some evidence that the Superb Parrot is declining in numbers, and is now considered to be New South Wales' second endemic species (G. Holmes *pers. comm.*) as it apparently no longer occurs outside this State.

In the Parkes District the status of this parrot appears to have altered and seems now to be nowhere as common as what it was 20 years ago, when residents knew this species well and they referred to it by the local name of "Green Leek".

From the foregoing information the Superb Parrot population would appear to be declining and consequently there must be some concern for its future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of A. K. Morris, for providing records and making helpful comments on the draft.

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NEST ROBBING BY THE SQUARE-TAILED KITE

G. CLANCY

On the morning of 6 November 1979 an adult Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* was observed soaring over a Grafton street close to the main shopping centre. After circling around for a short time it swiftly glided into a Pecan Nut Tree, and perched somewhat precariously close to a nest of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*. Its wings were outstretched and it appeared to be using them to help support it amongst the foliage. Whilst perched in this manner it delicately reached into the nest two or three times with its bill and each time appeared to remove and devour a nestling. It then took to the wing and resumed its low level soaring over the city. A similar incident occurred at South Grafton on 9 November 1979 when an adult Square-tailed Kite, possibly the same bird, landed near another nest of House Sparrow in a Mugga Ironbark *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*. The predator was unsuccessful this time as the nest was empty as the nestlings had fledged.

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NUTMEG MANNIKIN NEAR MUDGEE

NORMAN KURTZ

Early in August, 1979 Ross Kurtz, of Glenroy Vineyards, Cooyal, a property located 19 km east of Mudgee, observed a flock of finches feeding amongst the vines. He considered that the finches were not native to the area and so an effort was made to observe them further. This was not easy and it was also difficult to obtain an accurate count of numbers as the finches were shy and quickly flew to the cover of trees and vines when disturbed, often in the company of Double-barred Finches *Poephila bichenovii*. However, on the 12 August 1979 Ross and I were able to observe a flock of 25, identifying them as Nutmeg Mannikins *Lonchura punctulata*. The last sighting was made in the same area on 18 August 1979 when one was shot for positive identification.

It was considered important to obtain a specimen as I was not familiar with the similar Chestnut-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura castaneothorax*, a bird known to have occurred in the past, breeding at Mudgee during the period 1881-1888 (Cox and Hamilton 1889 *Proc. Linn. Soc.* **4**, 411).

The bird that was shot was an immature, as the breast and sides were not completely marbled, and the lower mandible was off-white in colour and not dark silvery-grey as indicated for the adults. Description was as follows:

> **Bill** upper dark grey, lower off-white; **legs** light grey; **head** and back cinnamon brown, **tail** brown, **under-tail** coverts cinnamon; **upper-tail** coverts brown; **throat** cinnamon, centre of abdomen buff; **breast** and flanks brown, some marbling.

The vineyards are situated on either side of the permanently flowing Stoney Creek, a tributary of the Cudgegong River. The area round the vineyards consists of open farming and grazing country with scattered clumps of timber. Dominant trees along the creek are Rough-barked Apple *Angophra floribunda*, Yellow Box *Eucalyptus melliodora* and *acacia sp*. In the gardens around the house are a number of introduced trees including the Peppercorn *Schinus molle*. This observation constitutes the first inland records for New South Wales as Gosper (1976 *Aust. Birds* **11**, 8-11) in his comprehensive review of the species in New South Wales makes no mention of inland localities.

N. K. KURTZ, Balmoral, RMB 4 Wollar Road, Mudgee N.S.W. 2851.

SPINE-TAILED SWIFT PERCHING ON TREE

TREVOR QUESTED

At 14.30 hours on 5 January 1980 along the road between Bowraville and Taylor's Arm near Macksville, on the New South Wales north coast, I was watching many Spine-tailed swifts *Hirundapus caudacutus* flying at tree-top height. The swifts were flying across a paddock cleared for pasture, containing some very old dead trees, that were approximately 35 m high. The Swifts were concentrated around one tree in particular as though there was a hatch of flying insects there.

Some of the Swifts were attempting to take the prey items off the trunk of the tree. One Swift was observed to land on the trunk for a brief period, about two seconds, picked the food off the trunk and then continued flying again. When the bird landed it perched on the trunk in a vertical position parallel to the tree at a height about 2.5 m from the top.

When the other Swifts attempted to catch the flying insects(?) on and near the tree, they appeared most awkward as they had to reduce their flight speed sufficiently to be able to almost hover, and then continue normal flying.

At the time the observation was made, there was plenty of sunshine, but the clouds were quickly building up for a big storm. I continued to watch for another five minutes after the first bird had landed but no other birds attempted to land although they continued to circle and feed around the same tree.

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FLIGHT SPEED OF THE CRESTED PIGEON

N. W. LONGMORE AND W. E. BOLES

Lindsey (1977 *Aust. Bird Watcher* **7**, 95) reported on the flight speed of the Common Bronzewing *Phaps chalcoptera*. We present here similar information on a related species, the Crested Pigeon *Ocyphaps lophotes*.

During a trip to South Australia, we flushed Crested Pigeons from the roadside on numerous occasions. On 27 October 1979, 22 km north of Meribah, South Australia, a single bird was flushed from the road's edge. It flew in front of and in the same direction as the vehicle. We adjusted our speed to that of the flying bird until at 55 km we were neither gaining or losing on the bird in front of us indicating that the speeds were equal.

The bird maintained this speed for 10-15 seconds for a distance of approximately 200 m before veering away from the road. The duration of this observation over this distance and time gave us a satisfactory estimation of the flight speed. Although the method was rough, it adds to a subject poorly discussed in Australina ornithological literature as stressed in Lindsey's note.

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W. E. BOLES, Australian Museum, College Street, Sydney N.S.W. 2000.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SHADING

MERLE BALDWIN

Dariel Larkins (1979 *Aust. Birds* **13**, 43-46) accurately describes how the Grey Butcherbird *Cracticus torquatus* shades its nestlings, and suggests possible triggers for this activity. She also quotes Morse Nice who considers shading to be "an important function of the parent". With this one must agree, but not with the assumption that shading is a voluntary action, that is, that the parent is aware of the plight of its young and tries to help them.

Both Larkins and Charles (in Larkins *loc. cit.*) think that the heat of the sun initiates shading but believe there is a contributing factor. The direct rays of the sun would certainly cause discomfort; the other factor could be the heat generated within the nest; this would irritate the sensitive brood patch compelling the sitting bird to rise and spread its wings so that cooling air might flow about its body – a posture matched by humans who raise their arms to cool off.

My own observations indicate that shading is brought about by conflict between the discomfort caused by ambient heat, and the genetic conditioning which obliges a bird to brood for a certain period. Examples of such conditioning are the ways in which birds remain on addled eggs although the stimulus of warmth is missing, and attempt to feed dead chicks which have not triggering gapes. A conditioned parent, although distressed, will keep standing above its nestlings and so creates a shade.

The posture adopted when shading i.e. with the back to the sun and feathers sleeked to eliminate heat, is contrary to one basking position where the bird faces the sun and fluffs its feathers so that heat rays can penetrate to the skin. Such basking, however, causes heat stress in a few minutes whereas the shading posture noted by Larkins was held for 32 minutes, indicating that the back – to – sun pose is the cooler one.

In most, perhaps all of the activities associated with nesting the initial stimulus appears to be a change in temperature. This is so when building nests and feeding young; in both cases rest periods coincide with rising temperatures and work periods with falling ones.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1970 *Ethology* 363) writes: "Each living organism is in continuous control of its environment through its sense organs and each is programmed in such a way as to avoid unfavourable conditions and stay in a favourable environment". I believe that one could oppose this view and argue that the environment controls the organism.

It does seem that there is a predetermined degree of heat which releases a chain reaction designed solely to relieve heat stress in nestlings.

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RINGED PLOVER AT BOTANY BAY

JUDITH AND NEIL RUSSILL

On Saturday 26 January 1980 at approximately 1600 hours, while watching waders at the old Cook's River mouth in Botany Bay, we observed a Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* alight onto the grey mud with a group of Mongolian Plovers *C.mongolus*. As we are aware that Ringed Plovers have been rarely recorded in New South Wales the following field notes were made:

The most prominent feature was the conspicuous white neck collar below a smooth brown crown with a small black breast band below the white extending around to the neck and back. **Eye** was black with a black line above and below running from base of bill to cap. There was a noticable white eyebrow and white forehead. **Bill** black with a yellowish base. When the bird was disturbed, it raised itself up and revealed that the black neck band which was quite dark at the sides, was lighter almost brown on the breast. **Underparts**, throat, and abdomen were white. **Wings** brownish with a prominent white wing stripe obvious when in flight. **Rump** was dark. **Tail** dark with white side edges and small white tips, with a darker band near lower edge. **Legs** orange-yellow. It was noticed that the Ringed Plover was shorter than the Mongolian Plovers but larger than the Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* and Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus* feeding nearby.

On the 26 January 1980 the bird was observed to be dragging one leg; however on the 28 January 1980 it used both legs until late morning then commenced to hop only on one leg again. This did not appear to hamper its movement in any way, and the bird continued to feed normally. This habit of dragging a leg has continued. Up to the time this article was written on 7 February 1980 the bird was still present.

When we returned home after first sighting the bird, we consulted H. T. Condon, and A. R. McGill (1974 *Field Guide to the Waders*) and P. Slater (1969 *Field Guide to Australian Birds* Part 1). The one major difference between our notes and the two reference texts was that the black bar above the white forehead which is clearly shown in the books, was not present on the bird we observed. However Prater *et al* (1977 *Guide to the Identification and Ageing of Holarctic Waders*) suggests that the second black forehead bar is a feature of summer plumage of adult birds only. The yellow base to the bill and the brownish breast bar suggest that our Plover was an immature, first winter bird. The white wing bar and lack of white line on crown, seperates the Ringed Plover from the similar Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*.

We are again indebted to Arnold McGill who agreed to accompany us the following morning to see the Ringed Plover. McGill has seen the Ringed Plover at Kooragang Island in 1967 (1969 *Aust Birdwatcher* **3**, 199) and confirmed that the bird we had under observation was the same species.

After photographing the Ringed Plover, we telephoned friends with the news and since then many people have had the pleasure of seeing this rare bird, and confirming our identification.

Four records exist for Australia, all for New South Wales, viz a specimen was taken at Port Stephens (Gould 1865 *Handbook of the Birds of Australia* 11:231), although this bird may have come from Port Stephens, South Africa; another specimen from Malabar in 1908 now in the "H. L. White Collection", National Museum of Victoria (*Emu* **54**, 227); in February 1967 at the mouth of the Hunter River and again in November 1967 (McGill *loc. cit.*). The Ringed Plover occurs widely in the Northern Hemisphere but apart from regular movements to South Africa it is rarely recorded migrating as far south in Australia.

JUDITH AND NEIL RUSSILL, 75 Bonds Rd., Peakhurst N.S.W. 2210.

A BREEDING RECORD OF THE BEACH STONE-CURLEW AT RED ROCK NEW SOUTH WALES

G. P. CLANCY AND M. CHRISTIANSEN

The Beach Stone-curlew *Esacus magnirostris* is very rare in New South Wales with the only location where the species is seen with any regularity being Red Rock, north of Coffs Harbour. A pair was recorded there on 1 September and 14 November 1976 (Rogers 1977 *Aust Birds* **11**, 90) and on subsequent occasion since, whilst Clancy observed single birds on 10 October and 2 November 1979. A local resident, R. Edgar, states that a pair of Stone-curlews has inhabited the one sand bar island continually for at least four years.

On 26 November 1979 the authors visited the sand bar island to carry out a census of the Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* nesting colony as part of a north coast survey of that species for the National Parks and Wildlife Service. At the time of landing from the boat a pair of adult Beach Stone-curlews was observed in addition to the breeding Little Terns. This was not surprising as R. Edgar *(pers. comm.)* advised that the pair of Stone-curlews spend all of their time on the one sand bar unless frightened off by the close approach of an observer. What was surprising was that the parent birds instead of fleeing at our approach ran towards us in a crouched position reminiscent of the crouching habit of the Striated Heron *Butorides striatus*.

This unusual behaviour of the birds prompted a search of the island for a nest which resulted in the discovery of a very young Beach Stone-curlew. It was hiding in a shallow depression in the sand under the largest Casuarina on the island. It was covered in grey-buff fluffy down, and had the characteristic facial markings and bill of the species the latter being relatively shorter than those of the parents. The effectiveness of the chick's camouflage was illustrated most impressively when, after examining the chick in the hand, it was placed back in the depression and we left the island to collect a C.S.I.R.O. bird band that wold be an appropriate size for the species. The C.S.I.R.O. list of band sizes does not list a size for the Beach Stone-curlew as none had been banded prior to that day. After collecting the bands we returned to the island but the young bird had vanished. A thorough search of the vegetated section of the island at first proved futile but after about twenty minutes the young bird was found lying motionless near a small Casurina tree. We had passed very close to it a number of times without seeing it! A C.S.I.R.O. bird band was placed on its right leg and then it was placed back in the depression under the largest tree.

During the handling and banding of the young bird the parents became very agitated and made several advances towards the banders. The agitation increased as the youngster called out.

On 1 January 1980 the young bird, which had lost most of its fluffy down and had well developed primaries, was found dead near the banding location. It had a broken neck but the cause of its death is not know. On 6 January the pair of adult birds were observed back at their usual location.

This is the second breeding record for N.S.W., the first being for a pair which nested on the shoreline near Tweed Heads in October 1930 (A. R. McGill 1960 *A Handlist of the Birds of New South Wales* p. 23). The young Beach Stone-curlew was the first of its species to be banded in Australia.

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AZURE KINGFISHER DISPLAY

G. CLANCY

At Clarenza on the Clarence River near Grafton two Azure Kingfishers *Ceyx azurea* were observed on 20 May 1979 to exhibit unusual behaviour apparently a form of display. The birds were perched on opposite concrete walls of a floodgate and were both calling. The call was reminiscent of that of the Red-brown Firetail *Emblema temporalis*. Suddenly one bird flew to the opposite wall and sat next to the other bird but faced the opposite direction. Both birds tilted their heads with the bill pointed towards the other bird's tail. While in this position the birds began to waddle, almost like penguins, in an anti-clockwise circular direction. This was maintained for a few seconds until one bird flew away pursued by the other. The display was considered to be a territorial aggressive display as both birds appeared to be males (very bright colours), it was not the breeding season when courtship displays would be expected, and the birds did not remain close together after the display.

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AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE-LARK TAKING BAT

J. N. HOBBS

At about 14.00 hrs on 20 March 1972, a still, sunny day, shade temperature 35°C a small brownish, unidentified bat, possibly *Vespadelus pumilus,* was watched flying at the edge of a large pool of water north of Ivanhoe, New South Wales. Apparently it was feeding on flying insects swarming just above the water. Numberous Welcome Swallows *Hirundo neoxena* were feeding on the insects also. One of the Swallows chased the bat and twice made a swooping attack upon it which the bat eluded by making a sharp turn and rising. After the second attack the bat had risen to about four metres above the water level when an Australian Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca* which had been feeding along the water's edge flew up, almost vertically, and took the bat in its bill, seizing it on the underparts just behind the wings. The two continued to rise at an angle, both with wings beating, and disappeared into the foliage of a box tree standing in the water about ten metres from the bank. The action was so quick and unexpected that I was unsure whether the bat towed the Magpie-lark into the tree or whether it was pushed and steered there by the bird. I could not see into the tree because of its dense foliage and when I walked towards it ten Magpie-larks flew out, none of which was carrying the bat. I did not see the bat again.

A bat, or animal of similar size, seems an unlikely food item for a Magpie-lark. However, in 1959 at Kyogle, New South Wales, I watched Magpie-larks feeding upon the bodies of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* which had been killed by strychnine baits. The Magpie-larks pecked open the soft skins of the stomachs and fed upon the stomach contents and the flesh of the Sparrows; at least six were inadvertently destroyed as a result. The baits were inaccessible to the Magpie-larks.

At Fletcher's Lake, Dareton, N.S.W. a Red-capped Plover *Charadrius ruficapillus* left its eggs and performed a distraction display before a Magpie-lark (Hobbs, 1972, *Emu* **72,** 125). This suggests the Plover recognised the Magpie-lark as a potential predator.

The literature claims the diet of the Magpie-lark is limited to insects and water snails but perhaps it is more extensive and the bird is not so innocuous as it appears.

The abnormal appearance of bats during the day has prompted a similar pursuit reaction by another Hirundine, the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* (Tugendhat 1966, *Brit. Birds* **59,** 435 and Rosair 1975, *Brit. Birds* **68,** 248).

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Vol. 14, No. 3 March, 1980

AUSTRALIAN BIRDS

CONTENTS

Schrader, N. W.	A review of the distribution of the Superb Parrot in central New South Wales	45
Clancy, G.	Nest robbing by the Square-tailed Kite	50
Kurtz, Norman	Nutmeg Mannikin near Mudgee	51
Quested, Trevor	Spine-tailed Swift perching on tree	52
Longmore, N. W. & W. E. Boles	Flight speed of the Crested Pigeon	52
Baldwin, M.	Some thoughts on shading	53
Russill, J. & N.	Ringed Plover at Botany Bay	54
Clancy, G. & M. Christiansen	A breeding record of the Beach Stone-curlew at Red Rock, New South Wales	55
Clancy, G.	Azure Kingfisher display	56
Hobbs, J. N.	Australian Magpie-lark taking a bat	56

Registered for Posting as a Periodical -Category B

Printed by R. V. B. PRINTERS, 138 Silverwater Road, Lidcombe, 2141