

## BIRDS AT A WATER TROUGH

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The late Colin Ellis spent 207 hours watching birds at a water trough, which he had positioned in mallee heath near Mount Monster, 10 km S of Keith. He kept notes on the birds he saw around the trough and we summarize these, since little is known about the drinking habits of Australian birds (but see Fisher *et al.* 1972, Davies 1972).

Mr Ellis erected a hide near the trough so that he could watch the birds without disturbing them. The trough was kept full during summer, but we do not know if water was permanently available. The notes span a period from December 1971 to January 1977. Although observations were made in each year, they were irregular and infrequent. All observations were made between September and March, and most between December and March. Observations usually spanned three hours and most were made at dawn or dusk. Mr Ellis noted all species seen or heard near the trough, recorded some as drinking or bathing, and gave exact times for these activities.

In analyzing his observations, we extracted the following data. For every hour of observation, we listed the species seen (irrespective of the number of individuals, or the number of times a species was recorded in the hour), and whether they were drinking or bathing. However, we are not sure that he recorded all species that used the water. Less than 10% of the birds recorded in hourly periods were noted as drinking or bathing or both. We have not determined diurnal patterns to the birds' behaviour, since Mr Ellis may not have recorded all visits to the water, nor did he observe for whole days.

Forty-six species were seen near the trough, 27 were recorded drinking and 15 bathing (Table 1). Of the 19 species not recorded drinking, 13 were seen in less than 10 of the 207 hour periods. We have seen most of these 19 species drinking elsewhere; and it is possible that they

TABLE 1  
Number of hours that species were seen near the trough, and whether they were recorded drinking or bathing.

Species seen near trough	No. of hours recorded	
Common Bronzewing	66) + 42*	d
Brush Bronzewing	21)	d
Crested Pigeon	19	d
Purple-crowned Lorikeet	1	
Crimson Rosella	9	
Eastern Rosella	26	
Mallee Ringneck	7	
Red-rumped Parrot	53	
Black-eared Cuckoo	1	
Welcome Swallow	1	d
White-winged Triller	3	d
Blackbird	1	
Southern Scrub-Robin	47	
Hooded Robin	6	
Golden Whistler	1	b d
Grey Shrike-thrush	51	
Crested Bellbird	3	
Grey Fantail	70	b d
Willie Wagtail	93	b d
White-browed Babbler	27	
Superb Fairy-wren	118)	b d
Variegated Fairy-wren	48) + 2*	b d
White-browed Scrubwren	45	b d
Shy Hylacola	10	
Weebill	10	
Buff-rumped Thornbill	61)	d
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	23) + 6*	
Striated Thornbill	2)	
Red Wattlebird	9	d
Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater	21	b d
White-eared Honeyeater	54	b d
Purple-gaped Honeyeater	1	
Brown-headed Honeyeater	117	b d
New Holland Honeyeater	187	b d
Tawny-crowned Honeyeater	37	b d
White-fronted Chat	9	
Yellow-rumped Pardalote	15	b d
Striated Pardalote	6	b d
Silveryeye	96	b d
European Goldfinch	90	b d
House Sparrow	1	
Common Starling	16	b d
Dusky Woodswallow	13	d
Australian Magpie	4	
Grey Currawong	11	d
Raven sp.	1	

b—species recorded bathing; d—species recorded drinking; \* species not specified.

may have drunk but not been recorded. However, Mr Ellis noted specifically that the Southern Scrub-Robin *Drymodes brunneopygia* never drank, although it was recorded in 47 hourly periods.

Honeyeaters, particularly the New Holland *Phylidonyris novaehollandiae* and the Brown-headed *Melithreptus brevirostris*, were the most frequent visitors to the trough. 23% of the species recorded in hourly periods were honeyeaters, and they accounted for 30% (28/93) of the records for drinking and 76% (78/102) of those for bathing. These honeyeaters, which feed mainly on nectar, manna and honeydew (Paton 1980), may need to bathe frequently to remove pollen and sugars adhering to their bills and feathers.

Bronzewings *Phaps* spp. were recorded drinking on 13 occasions, but never bathing. Sur-

prisingly parrots were recorded drinking only twice and never bathing. Flycatchers *Rhipidura* spp., thornbills *Acanthiza* spp., scrub wrens *Sericornis* sp. and fairy-wrens *Malurus* spp., Grey Shrike-thrush *Colluricinclla harmonica*, Silvereye *Zosterops lateralis* and European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* were often seen near the trough and recorded both bathing and drinking.

Mrs Gwen Ellis kindly allowed us to read and extract data from her husband's notebooks.

#### REFERENCES

- Davies, S. J. J. F. 1972. Results of 40 hours' continuous watch at five waterpoints in an Australian desert. *Emu*, 72:8-12.  
 Fisher, C. D., E. Lindgren and W. R. Dawson. 1972. Drinking patterns and behaviour of desert birds in relation to their ecology and abundance. *Condor*, 74:111-136.  
 Paton, D. G. 1980. The importance of manna, honeydew and lerp in the diets of honeyeaters. *Emu*, in press.

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