

## BIRD NOTE

**WOODSWALLOWS EATING FRUIT** The White-browed Woodswallow *Artamus superciliosus* is a regular spring and summer migrant to the Strathalbyn district, but numbers vary widely from year to year. Its congener, the Masked Woodswallow *Artamus personatus*, often, but not invariably, is in company with it. In the spring of 1987 there had been no evidence of the migratory Woodswallows in September or October, despite some searching of their favourite haunts. Yet, on 7 November D. Phillips noticed large numbers along some little-used roads 5 km north-east of Langhorne Creek. Two days later he took L. Potts and visiting South African L. Coley to the locality.

They estimated that at least 2000 birds were present, with White-browed in the majority. They were feeding on the small berries of the succulent plants *Enchylaena tomentosa* and *Rhagodia candolleana* which were prevalent as understorey amongst the sparse mallee roadside vegetation. They perched upon the bushes to search and probe for berries and some bushes were literally covered with birds. Up to one hundred were feeding on larger bushes of a metre in width and less than a metre high. Some would leave to aerial

feed over adjacent paddocks and their places would be taken by others flying in.

When I visited the area a few days later the bushes were completely stripped of fruit and only a few Woodswallows were present. Thus the banquet lasted only about a week and despite the large congregation none remained to breed, even though a favoured nesting area was less than 2 km away. The bushes mentioned are common in many other parts of the district but these were not utilised. We have never witnessed such feeding behaviour before and are not aware of any unusual circumstances which may have caused the plants to fruit abnormally. Woodswallows are generally recognized as being insectivorous birds which occasionally take nectar. I know of only one other record of Woodswallows feeding on berries; Black-faced Woodswallows *Artamus cinereus* were seen feeding on *Enchylaena tomentosa* berries during light rain on a cold windy day at Pt Broughton (8 June 1980, Lynn Pedler pers. comm.).

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