DUSKY WOODSWALLOWS AT INNAMINCKA REGIONAL RESERVE.

The Dusky Woodswallow *Artamus cyanopterus* is generally quite a common species throughout its range from the Atherton Tableland in north-eastern Queensland south to Tasmania and then west across southern South Australia and south-western Western Australia (Blakers *et al.* 1984; Pizzey 1997). It generally favours wetter forests and woodlands but does venture inland and in South Australia it occupies drier scrubs and woodlands to about as far north as 30°S (to the northern end of the Gammon Ranges and just north of the East–West Trans-Australia Railway Line) (Blakers *et al.* 1984). A spring–summer breeding migrant to south-eastern Australia, Tasmania and southern South Australia, most of the populations in these areas move away in winter and are thought to largely winter further north including inland areas of New South Wales and Queensland (Blakers *et al.* 1984; Pizzey 1997).

Until now there appears to be only one record of this species from the far north of South Australia, that of a flock of 12 birds on the Cooper Creek in June 1978 (Blakers *et al.* 1984). This note documents further sightings on the upper Cooper Creek in the Innamincka Regional Reserve of far north-eastern South Australia.

The Record

On 27 July 1997, whilst taking part in a joint Biological Survey of the Innamincka Regional Reserve (Australian Geographic Society/Dept of Environment and Natural Resources), I observed a pair of Dusky Woodswallows in coolibah *Eucalyptus coolabah* woodland on the edge of Mudlumpa Waterhole (27°43'S, 140°51'E). This waterhole, about 1 km long and 70 m wide, was isolated from the main branch of the Cooper Creek – the well known Callyamurra Waterhole being approximately 2 km north-east of it. The birds were first noticed perched five metres up in a coolibah tree overhanging the western end of the waterhole. They actively foraged over the water for flying insects and returned again to perch in the coolibahs that lined this waterhole. They were immediately recognisable as Dusky Woodswallows by the distinctive white leading edge to their wings and by their brown body plumage and contrasting bluish grey wings. The birds showed no tendency to move away and were still calling and feeding when I departed some hours later.

In company with two other observers, I returned to Mudlumpa Waterhole the following day and observed the same pair of birds. Also on this day, I observed one other Dusky Woodswallow foraging in stunted coolibah woodland on a dry floodplain of the Cooper Creek about 1 km south-west of Burke's Grave and approximately 3 km WSW of Mudlumpa Waterhole. This, the last of three Dusky Woodswallows I recorded during the trip, was possibly the same individual reported by Valerie Reed (Aust. Geographic Society ornithologist) at the same location on 29 July 1997 during a bird transect.

Discussion

It is perhaps a little surprising that Dusky Woodswallows have been so rarely sighted along the Cooper Creek system in South Australia. Excellent woodswallow habitat exists

here in the form of river red gum *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* forest and coolibah woodland. Reid (1988) in his extensive bird studies of Coongie Lakes and other parts of the Cooper Creek system within Innamincka Regional Reserve did not record this species.

It would appear that this species is able to utilise the wetter Flinders Ranges as a corridor from the south to move as far inland as the northern extremity of the Gammon Ranges in South Australia. Its passage north is possibly blocked by the vast desert dune country of the Strzelecki and Tirari Deserts. Vagrants may be capable of finding their way further north to the tree-lined Strzelecki or Cooper Creeks thence upstream to the far north-east of South Australia. However, Badman (1979) in his extensive studies of the 'Birds of the Southern and Western Lake Eyre Drainage' did not record this species along the lower and central parts of the Cooper Creek system. Moreover, he did not record this species in his later work on *The Birds of the Middle and Lower Cooper Creek in South Australia* (Badman 1989). Interestingly he discussed the validity of the 1978 RAOU Bird Atlas sighting of Dusky Woodswallows on the upper Cooper Creek in South Australia (Blakers *et al.* 1984). He quite reasonably said the species was 'unlikely to occur in this area, and until a full report of this sighting is published I regard it as unacceptable...'.

I suspect that the Dusky Woodswallows observed at Innamincka Regional Reserve in July 1997 followed the Cooper Creek via its riparian forest/woodland corridor downstream from Queensland. Blakers *et al.* (1984) when discussing this species state that 'birds will move inland' along inland river systems during winter months and cite two examples of inland records which support this statement. One is of 12 birds on Cooper Creek at Innamincka Regional Reserve in June 1978, mentioned earlier in this note; the other is of five or six adults on the Paroo River just north of the New South Wales border in August 1980 (28°S, 144°E).

In Queensland, the western inland limit of its range is at about 144°E, which is the extreme upper reaches of the Cooper Creek (Thomson and Barcoo Rivers) and the Paroo River, a north-eastern branch of the Darling River system (Blakers *et al.* 1984; Pizzey 1997). The closest observations upstream on the Thomson/Barcoo system are approximately 600 km north-east of the South Australian Cooper Creek sightings. The Paroo River record is closer—about 500 km away—but not connected to the same river system.

It will be interesting to see if this species remains at Innamincka Regional Reserve in small numbers over an extended period of time, or if it is truly a vagrant which only ventures this far inland in response to suitable climatic conditions such as extraordinary rainfall and water flow into the river system. Just prior to these latest observations substantial rains had fallen in Queensland resulting in the Cooper Creek flowing a metre over the causeway at Innamincka. The North West Branch had filled the Coongie Lakes system to capacity and floodwater was overflowing south into the swales of the dunes.

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Chris Baxter: 4 Richardson Crescent, Port Augusta, S.A. 5700

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