

Book Review

Curlews on Vulture Street

DARRYL JONES, 2022

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This memoir is an exploration of birds and their behaviours that have shaped the scientific work of Darryl Jones, its author and subject. Jones has had a distinguished career as a behavioural ecologist at Griffith University, where he is now Professor Emeritus, specialising in urban bird ecology.

Each of the eight chapters focuses on one or a few bird species of particular significance in the author's life, beginning with a Common Blackbird, then a rare find in 1960s Wagga Wagga, sparking the realisation that careful observation can lead to fascinating discoveries.

Observations on the breeding biology of Brush Turkeys in Armidale led to his first publication while still an undergraduate, and on to his ground-breaking Ph.D. project on the same species in Queensland. As an expert in the field, he was then called upon to sort increasing human – Brush Turkey conflicts as the latter adapted to urban life in Brisbane. He recounts an episode in which an irate homeowner found her newly landscaped garden, with a tonne of compost and 50 seedlings neatly planted in mulched beds, had been comprehensively removed overnight by an enthusiastic male Brush Turkey, delighted to find so much easily raked material for his new mound. Jones's quick-witted handling of the situation is a delight to read.

Other chapters describe work by the author and colleagues on exotic bird species in urban Wagga Wagga, swooping Australian Magpies,



communal roosting of Torresian Crows, roost choice in brightly-lit areas by Rainbow Lorikeets, feeding of wild birds by humans, the diet of Australian White Ibis in a big city, and how Bush Stonecurlews are thriving in Brisbane where foxes abound. Jones skilfully combines scientific accounts with a relaxed writing style sprinkled with humorous anecdotes. We are entertained by his experiences of bird monitoring in suburbia (and the hazards of binocular use among prying eyes), colour-marking white ibis in a city park (with food dye squirted from children's water-soaker guns – a tricky task when sharing your field site with the public), and innovative methods to band and wing-tag wary and cunning Torresian Crows.

Throughout the book Jones reminds us that scientific investigation often produces unexpected results, as he describes testing widely-held assumptions that time and again prove to be wrong: 'everyone hates crows', 'Rainbow Lorikeets don't eat meat' and 'nobody feeds birds in Australia', among others. The final section of the book lists published references, including many of the author's key scientific papers and books, providing a valuable resource for further reading.

I recommend this book to all who have an interest in Australia's birds.

Philippa Horton