

## BIRDS SEEN IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

## PART TWO

By D. A. G. THOMAS

Magpie-Lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*).—Common in pairs in all areas visited. One pair at Adelaide River Camp would walk in through the door of my hut if they saw the camp kitten inside. The two birds would pass calmly under the tables on a tour of inspection, calling loudly, finally driving the kitten outside.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina novae-hollandiae*).—Ubiquitous as regards areas visited or traversed en route from Alice Springs, tending rather to be displaced by the White-breasted species in the Adelaide River-Darwin district. A nest was found at Barrow Creek in January on the horizontal limb of a gum about 15 feet from the ground, but even at this close range the nest was almost indiscernible without the sitting bird.

White-breasted Cuckoo-Shrike (*C. hypoleuca*).—Plentiful in the open timber country of the Adelaide River-Darwin district. Same wing-shuffle on alighting as the Black-faced species and similar call-note.

White-winged Triller (*Lalage tricolor*).—Seen in pairs in open timber south of Birdum and fairly common about Darwin.

Variéd Triller (*L. leucomela*).—Rather more plentiful around Darwin than the White-winged species, occurring in pairs in shrubs flanking main streets. The harsh, unmusical call-note is not unlike one of those uttered by the Great Bower Bird; possibly mimicry in the case of the latter?

Yellow Figbird (*Sphecotheres flaviventris*).—Fairly common in Darwin, frequenting small acacias and gums throughout the town. Also observed in Banyans at Marakai.

Red-breasted Babbler (*Pomatostomus ruficulus*).—Plentiful in Adelaide River district, frequently passing in noisy procession through the camp area. Characteristic bulky, stick nests observed on many occasions. In March one of these nests at Adelaide River Camp contained young, and a fierce struggle ensued when a pair of Blue-faced Honeyeaters sought to usurp it.

Many Babblers joined in the fight, but were all driven off by the Honeyeaters, who remained in possession of the nest for an hour or so before relinquishing it to the Babblers. A week later the young birds were on the wing, and the Honeyeaters resumed possession of the nest.

White-throated Warbler (*Gerygone olivacea*).—Very active in upper foliage of gums near Middle Arm, Darwin Harbour, where its attractive little song was heard all through the day.

Dusky Warbler (*G. tenebrosa*)?—One only seen in Holmes Jungle. The bird was quite fearless and passed close by, intensively searching for insects among branches a few feet above the ground. Uttering a lively song but very softly, so that close observation was needed to hear it.

Yellow Weebill (*Smicrornis flavescens*).—Common at Adelaide River Camp and about Darwin. Extremely tame, descending among the leafy tips of small gums to within a foot or so of my head. The call-note is a constant "twit-twit," varied occasionally by a remarkably robust and cheerful whistle. These little birds remained on hand throughout the utmost severity of the wet season. Local aborigines foster a legend that the Yellow Weebill is the gossip-carrier and tale-bearer between rival camps, suspicion passing in this instance from the Wagtail!

Golden-headed Fantail-Warbler (*Cisticola exilis*).—Observed perching and singing on tall stalks above thick grass clumps at Adelaide River Camp and Ludmilla Creek. Difficult to approach as the birds would drop down into the cover and slip away unobtrusively.

Blue-and-White Wren (*Malurus cyanotus*).—One adult male bird seen in party of six or seven among spinifex and low scrub approximately 40 miles north of Alice Springs. This male left the rest of the party and kept well ahead, giving no opportunity for close observation.

- Red-backed Wren (*M. melanocephalus*).—Parties of Wrens were often observed passing through tall grass at Adelaide River Camp, but in the absence of males in full plumage I was unable to form any opinion as to the species. In the majority of instances, however, a party would be attended by an adult Red-backed male, this species seeming to be quite common in all districts visited in the upper portion of the Territory.
- White-breasted Woodswallow (*Artamus leucorhynchus*).—Very plentiful in the Darwin area between November and January, a pair nesting during the height of the wet season in a small gum at Larrekeyah Barracks.
- Black-faced Woodswallow (*A. melanops*).—Small groups observed in open timber south of Birdum. Plentiful at Manton River Dam, hawking for insects over the water.
- White-winged Sittella (*Neositta leucoptera*).—A flock seen in open timber country south of Birdum.
- Brown Tree-Creeper (*Climacteris picumnus*).—One only seen at Birdum, calling loudly from dead tree-stump at dusk.
- Black-tailed Tree-Creeper (*C. melanura*).—Common in timber country at Adelaide River Camp and northwards to Darwin. Piercing call-note, uttered while gliding from tree to tree, like Brown Tree-Creeper.
- Mistletoe-Bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*).—Occasional pairs, particularly at Mary River, where mistletoe is much in evidence. Observed at Adelaide River Camp gathering cobwebs from telephone insulators.
- Black-headed Pardalote (*Pardalotus melanocephalus*).—Fairly common in all areas visited, active in foliage of gums. At Katherine in May they were keenly interested in freshly-dug post-holes, leaving the cavity only when a post was about to be planted.
- Yellow Silvereye (*Zosterops lutea*).—Seen in flowering scrub bordering Ludmilla Creek near Darwin. Sweet, tuneful song, uttered very softly.
- White-throated Honeyeater (*Meliphaga albogularis*).—Commonest of the Honeyeaters found in the upper portion of the Territory. Plentiful in small gums and acacias about Adelaide River and Darwin. Call-note imitated by Spangled Drongo.
- Red-headed Honeyeater (*Myzomela erythrocephala*).—In pairs in flowering scrub bordering Ludmilla Creek during November and December. Individual males varied considerably, one or two exhibiting what appeared to be adult plumage in full phase but even these lacking the red rump. Females uniformly drab, apart from reddish tint in front of head. Silent by comparison with Scarlet Honeyeater.
- Banded Honeyeater (*M. pectoralis*).—Observed in pairs at Birdum only, among flowering shrubs and small gums in January. Very aggressive towards other species. Females conspicuous by mottled "gun-metal" plumage on back.
- Dusky Honeyeater (*M. obscura*).—Singly and in pairs in vicinity of water, usually frequenting bushes and shrubs overhanging streams. Long, curved bill and hovering flight reminiscent of Spinebill; those seen at Manton River Dam were hovering beneath garden taps to catch drips.
- White-breasted Honeyeater (*Gliciphila fasciata*).—In flocks of a dozen or so frequenting Paper Barks (*Melaleuca*) at Marrakai and Mary River. Also plentiful in small gums near Middle Arm, Darwin Harbour. Call-notes of a flock rather like those of common Grass Parrot (*Psephotus haematonotus*).
- Brown Honeyeater (*G. indistincta*).—Singly in low brush and small scrub at Adelaide River Camp. Strong, musical song like that of Reed-Warbler.
- Rufous-banded Honeyeater (*Conopophila albogularis*).—Singly and in pairs in Paper Barks at Mary River and later common in Darwin township during December. Nesting in Acacia (?) at Larrekeyah Barracks, Darwin, in December, when the male was seen driving off a Yellow Figbird from the nest tree.
- Yellow-fronted Honeyeater (*Meliphaga plumula*).—In flowering gums at Cabbage-Tree Well, north of Alice Springs.
- Yellow-tinted Honeyeater (*M. flavescens*).—Observed at Birdum in flowering shrubs and small gums, where they were "persecuted" by Banded Honeyeaters.
- White-gaped Honeyeater (*Stomiopera unicolor*).—In small flocks, travelling through trees flanking streams. Rather noisy and aggressive towards other species.

- Yellow-throated Miner (*Myzantha flavigula*).—Plentiful in open timber north of Adelaide River. Nesting in July at Noonamah in lowest branch of gum, about 20 feet from ground.
- Blue-faced Honeyeater (*Entomyzon cyanotis*).—In March this species was plentiful at Adelaide River Camp, occurring in flocks of 20 or 30 birds, which twisted and turned in flight from tree to tree so as to suggest organised play. The Northern Territory phase of this species is quite distinct by virtue of its smaller size and the white patch in the wing-quills. All those seen conformed to this. This bird was conspicuous towards dusk, when it would take up a position on the topmost bare twig of a tree, uttering a querulous oft-repeated "Swee-e-e-t" note before going to roost. A pair observed in March at Adelaide River Camp taking over nest of Red-breasted Babbler q.v.
- Silver-crowned Friar-Bird (*Philemon argenteiceps*).—Plentiful in open timber country about Adelaide River, Darwin, and surrounding districts. Nesting at Adelaide River Camp in March during torrential rain of the wet season. The parent birds used to fly into my hut to collect insects from spider-webs with which to feed the young. Another pair brought out young in the camp area during September. A Pied Butcher-Bird which menaced one of the fledglings was badly worsted in combat with the parent Friar-Birds.
- Noisy Friar-Bird (*P. corniculatus*).—Singly in open scrub at Birdum in January.
- Little Friar-Bird (*P. citreogularis*).—Singly in open scrub at Birdum in January.
- Australian Pipit (*Anthus australis*).—One only observed on barrack square at Larrekeyah Barracks, Darwin, towards the end of December.
- Horsfield Bushlark (*Mirafra javanica*).—Seen singly and in pairs on grassy flats about Adelaide River and on open grassy plains near Marrakai. A pair was also seen in December in tussocky grass covering dried-up flats near Ludmilla Creek, Darwin. They would allow close approach before making short flights a few feet above the ground, always terminating in a brief hover before the birds dropped into the cover of the grass.
- Zebra Finch (*Taeniopygia castanotis*).—In large flocks at Newcastle Waters, where they came to drink during the afternoon at a soakage pool formed by overflow from shower-baths. The great heat seemed to impose an armistice whilst a Peregrine Falcon drank amongst the Finches. Afterwards all sought the shade of nearby Bauhinia trees. This Finch was rarely seen from Adelaide River northwards. At Alice Springs aerodrome in January a pair was busy carrying nesting material into a small orifice in the under-surface of the wing-tip of a Liberator bomber which had been grounded for several days!
- Banded Finch (*Steganopleura bichenovii*).—In flocks with Zebra Finches at drinking-pool, Newcastle Waters. Also observed drinking at overflow from showers at Birdum.
- Black-ringed Finch (*S. annulosa*).—This species seemed to displace the Banded variety from Adelaide River northwards. It was the commonest species of finch seen in the latter areas, being particularly friendly in Adelaide River Camp, where one pair came regularly to drink on the floor of the open-air showers when these were fully and noisily occupied. Several nests were found, the sites varying from very exposed low bushes to dense Pandanus palms.
- Chestnut-breasted Finch (*Donacola castaneo-thorax*).—A flock observed in December at Ludmilla Creek, near Darwin, feeding over burnt-out area of ground left after passage of fire.
- Pictorella Finch (*D. pectoralis*).—A flock seen drinking at roadside pool near Ludmilla Creek in December.
- Crimson Finch (*Neochmia phaeton*).—Ranking next after the Black-ringed species as the commonest finch in the area from Adelaide River northwards. Also frequently observed in Katherine area. Seldom seen other than in association with Pandanus palms and several birds were noticed carrying long strands of dried grass to nesting sites in these palms. In this species the familiar, plaintive finch note is replaced by a sharp "twit-twit."

Long-tailed Finch (*Poephila acuticauda*).—Only seen at Birdum; on each occasion this area was visited, all those observed having the bill red-coloured.

Black-tailed Finch (*P. atropygialis*).—One seen in company with Crimson species drinking in garden at Manton River Dam.

Masked Finch (*P. personata*).—One only seen in small gum at Adelaide River Camp.

Olive-backed Oriole (*Oriolus sagittatus*).—Found nesting at Berry Springs with male Koels in close attendance, the nest being neatly-woven of bark some thirty feet from the ground in this jungle-scrub.

Yellow Oriole (*O. flavocinctus*).—An outstanding songster, glorious liquid notes coming from topmost branches of tall trees flanking streams, particularly in early morning. The yellow-green plumage on the under-surface makes this bird very difficult to detect among the foliage.

Spangled Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*).—Nesting at Berry Springs, the nest being constructed of fine grass and root-tendrils near the extremity of a bough some twenty feet from the ground. Another nest was found in December right on the coast at Fanny Bay, at a height of eight feet only. The parent birds approached fearlessly to feed the young. Drongoes mimicked the notes of the White-throated Honeyeater consistently, prefacing their calls with these notes on nearly every occasion.

Apostle Bird (*Struthidea cinerea*).—One only seen in Boxwood tree by roadside south of Birdum in January.

Great Bower-Bird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*).—Fairly common in the areas visited from Birdum northwards. A constant visitor to the Mangoes at Adelaide River, when the fruit was ripening, and also showing a fondness for Paw-paws. No evidence of mimicry was obtained, the only note heard being a harsh, unmusical one rather like that uttered by the Varied Triller. No recording was made of the male displaying the lilac collar. One bird at Birdum was seen to enter a tent and ransack the odds and ends on a table before departing with a safety-razor blade in its bill. A pair constructed their bower beneath a stretcher-bed in a camp-hut for several weeks, not-

withstanding that it was zealously removed by a batman each morning! Ornaments at bowers included spent rifle cartridge-cases.

Australian Crow (*Corvus ceciliae*).—No recordings were made north of Birdum.

Pied Butcher-Bird (*Cracticus nigrogularis*).—Fairly common in open gum-country at Adelaide River Camp and northwards to Darwin. Nesting in low gums at Adelaide River in September. At no time throughout a year's observation did these birds utter anything approaching the glorious song of those heard in North Queensland.

Black Butcher-Bird (*C. quoyi*).—Singly in mangroves at Middle Arm, Darwin Harbour, and in scrub bordering Ludmilla Creek. Those observed were silent and wary. Red phase not seen.

Grey Butcher-Bird (*C. torquatus*).—Not observed north of Alice Springs.

Silver-backed Butcher-Bird (*C. argenteus*).—In pairs in timber country north of Adelaide River Camp. Also at Manton River Dam. This species has a very rich but attenuated song, which seems to call for some effort for its production. The notes are remarkably like some of those uttered by the Victoria Rifle-Bird (*Ptiloris victoriae*) in North Queensland, but as the distribution of the two species is mutually exclusive, the similarity is probably pure coincidence and not the product of mimicry on the part of the Rifle-Bird.

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