

## THE RECORDS OF THE GLOSSY BLACK-COCKATOO FROM THE SOUTH-EAST OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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South Australian reports of the Glossy Black-Cockatoo *Calyptrorhynchus lathami* come from three districts—Kangaroo Island, the South Mount Lofty Ranges and the South-East. Those from the first are well established as authentic, and pertain to a small resident population found mainly in the western and northern parts of the island (Joseph 1982a). Those from the second, all unsubstantiated, would if correct suggest that the species occurred there once regularly but now only as a very occasional straggler (Parker in prep.). Those from the third, long in dispute, form the subject of the present article.

The first report of *lathami* from the South-East, albeit tentative, was by Edwin Ashby (in Mathews 1916-17 : 131), who wrote: 'A few years ago a pair possibly of this species nested at Naracoort[sic] . . . my friends who tried to rear the young were unsuccessful.'

The next report was by Sutton (1937) who under *lathami* mentioned three tail-feathers (SAM B30809 a-c) forwarded in May 1937 by Mr H. Lindsay of Eurunga via Naracoorte. According to Lindsay, the birds concerned were found only in the Bangham Scrub between Frances and Wolseley. Lendon (1946) dismissed Sutton's ascription of these feathers to *lathami*, regarding all reports of the latter from the South-East as referable to the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo *C. magnificus*. Condon (1962), however, vouched for the correctness of Sutton's identification.

The third and latest report was by the late A. R. Attiwill (1972), who in an article on birds breeding in the Naracoorte district in 1941-1971 wrote under *lathami*: 'October only month when eggs recorded. Rare. Feeds on seeds of *Casuarina* species.' Mr Attiwill (in litt. 6 June 1977, 18 Oct. 1979) kindly supplied the information upon which these remarks were based. He recorded the birds in small numbers in an area of *Casuarina luehmannii* scrub (since cleared), 8-11.2 km north of Naracoorte on the Cadgee-Frances road, and identified them as *lathami* principally because they were feeding on the fruits of the casuarinas, a habit characteristic of *lathami*. On 14 October 1950, he found a nest about 40 feet up in a dead gum, and collected its heavily incubated single egg.

Against the claims that *C. lathami* occurs in the South-East and in adjacent south-western Victoria, we have the opinions of Lendon (1946) and Austin (1963) that the species concerned is actually the very similar *C. magnificus*, the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. To help us decide between these opposing views, we have for examination only the three tail-feathers and the egg mentioned above.

In 1976, I sent the three tail-feathers (one adult male phase, two female phase) to Mr K. Muller, then of the Taronga Zoo, Sydney, and Mr A. R. McEvey of the National Museum of Victoria. Muller replied that in his opinion they were referable to *C. lathami*, McEvey that they were with little doubt referable to the local population of *C. magnificus*. Though it was Muller's view that was ultimately accepted by Forshaw (1981 : 83), it is McEvey's that appears to be correct. Mr L. Joseph (pers. comm.) has kindly drawn my attention to a previously unremarked difference between adult females of *lathami* and adult females of the South-Eastern population of *magnificus*, viz. that in the former the red on the dorsal surface of the outer vanes of the rectrices does not vary in intensity along the length of the web, whereas in the latter it pales proximally into a pale orange-yellow. In this respect, the two female-phase rectrices reported by Sutton are referable to *magnificus*. No satisfactory way of distinguishing between the rectrices of the adult males of these forms having yet been found, it seems reasonable for the present to refer the male-phase rectrix to *magnificus* by association.

With regard to Attiwill's report of *lathami* breeding north of Naracoorte, it must be pointed out that his chief reason for determining the birds in question as *lathami* was unfortunately based on a false premise, namely that of the 'red-tailed' black cockatoos only *lathami* fed on casuarinas. For, in the South-East, *magnificus* feeds regularly on *Casuarina luehmannii* (Joseph 1982b). Moreover, the date on which Attiwill found the egg, 14 October, falls within the egg-dates for *magnificus*, a spring-summer breeder, but outside those of *lathami*, a late summer-early winter breeder. Finally, the egg in question measures 50.03 x 35.12 mm., dimensions above the range of *lathami* but within that of *mag-*

*nificus*.<sup>1</sup> I therefore refer Attiwill's observations to *magnificus*, not *lathamii*. In fairness to Mr Attiwill, whose dedicated recording of the birdlife of the South-East remains unparalleled, it should be pointed out that other eminent ornithologists have confused these two species in the field, and even in the hand (see for instance Lendon 1968).

In summary, the evidence used to identify the 'red-tailed' black cockatoos of the South-East as *lathamii* is either reinterpretable in favour of *magnificus*, or equivocal. The presence of *magnificus* in the South-East and adjacent Victoria is already well known, the populations there belonging to an isolated, distinctive and undescribed subspecies (R. Schodde pers. comm.) imperilled by scrub-clearing (Joseph 1982b.) With the reports of *lathamii* from these 'districts' reassigned to *magnificus*, the most westerly authentic mainland records of *lathamii* now become Strath-

bogie and Wangaratta, north-east of Melbourne (Forshaw 1981).

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- <sup>1</sup> Measurement of 12 eggs of *lathamii*: length 41.40-47.70, breadth 30.75 - 34.52, averages 44.34, 33.00; 18 eggs of *magnificus*: length 44.58 - 52.36, breadth 33.38 - 38.82, averages 49.79, 36.41.

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