

RECENT BIRD RECORDS FROM EAST OF LAKE GAIRDNER, GAWLER RANGES, S.A.

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SUMMARY

In this article we present information on several bird species recorded during visits to Nonning Station, in the eastern Gawler Ranges, between 1985 and 1991. There has been little or no information published about these species in the Gawler Ranges.

INTRODUCTION

In their review of the birds of the Gawler Ranges, Joseph and Black (1983) commented on the paucity of bird records from areas in the northern regions of the ranges, east of Lake Gairdner. A biological survey of the Gawler Ranges was carried out by the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service in October 1985 (Robinson *et al.* 1988) but this did not include the region mentioned above. The observations presented here provide information on bird species observed on the northern portion of Nonning Station (Fig. 1) by the authors and others from 1985 to 1991. We have only included birds recorded outside their known range or for which little published information is available. The details of these trips are provided as follows:

1. 2-4 June 1985; JM, GC, R. Allen and A. McIntyre.
2. 28-31 August 1985; JM, GC, J. Allen and A. McIntyre.
3. 7-8 November 1987; JM, GC, R. Allen, R. Kernot and A. Reimanis.
4. 17-19 September 1989; JM, GC, R. Allen and T. Croft.
5. 27 May–3 June 1990; JM, GC, T. Croft.
6. 15-21 June 1991; JM and GC.
7. 7-9 November 1991; JM and GC.

The vegetation is diverse and occurs as a mosaic of habitats throughout. The dominant plant species of the habitats from which bird observations were made are described below. A more thorough account of the vegetation of the Gawler Ranges is given in Robinson *et al.* (1988). These observations are limited to the six principal habitats described below.

Chenopod Plains

Plains consisting of *Atriplex vesicaria*, *Maireana*

pyramidata, and/or *M. sedifolia* open shrubland on clay-loams or calcareous soils. Other plants present include one or more of *Maireana* spp., *Rhagodia ulicina*, *Sclerolaena* spp., *Lycium australe*, *Frankenia* sp. as well as various annuals and grasses (typically *Stipa* spp.). Percentage cover of chenopod species was between 15% and 30% depending on the locality.

Myall Woodland

Western myall *Acacia papyrocarpa* low open woodland with occasional *Myoporum platycarpum*, *Allocasuarina cristata* ssp. *pauper*, *Senna* spp., *Acacia tetragonophylla* and *Alectryon oleaefolium* over open chenopod shrubland on clay-loams or calcareous soils.

Myall/Mulga Woodland

Open mixed myall *Acacia papyrocarpa* and mulga *Acacia aneura* woodland on sand flats or dunes. Other plants include *Myoporum platycarpum*, *Acacia ramulosa*, *Alectryon oleaefolium*, *Allocasuarina cristata* ssp. *pauper*, *Senna* spp. and *Pittosporum phylliraeoides* as well as other shrubs, ground covers and grasses. The relative proportion of myall to mulga varied greatly from area to area.

Horse Mulga/Mallee Woodland

Mallee *Eucalyptus socialis* and horse mulga *Acacia ramulosa* open woodland on dunes with numerous other shrubs including *Senna* spp., *Dodonaea viscosa*, *Eremophila* spp. and *Alectryon oleaefolium*. These dunes form part of the Barton Sandhills.

Tall Mallee Woodland

Open tall mallee *Eucalyptus oleosa*, *E. brachycalyx* and *E. socialis* on clay-loam with numerous other less dominant plants including *Myoporum platycarpum*, *Allocasuarina cristata* ssp. *pauper*, *Acacia* spp., *Senna* ssp. and *Eremophila* spp.

Native Pine Woodland

Native pine *Callitris columellaris* woodland on gypseous dunes fringing Lake Gairdner. Other plants include *Myoporum platycarpum* and *Acacia* spp.

ANNOTATED LIST

BANDED STILT *Cladorhynchus leucocephalus*
Small numbers heard at night on 30 May 1990, 6 km E of Wipipippee Hills and numerous flocks heard at the same locality on moonlit nights between

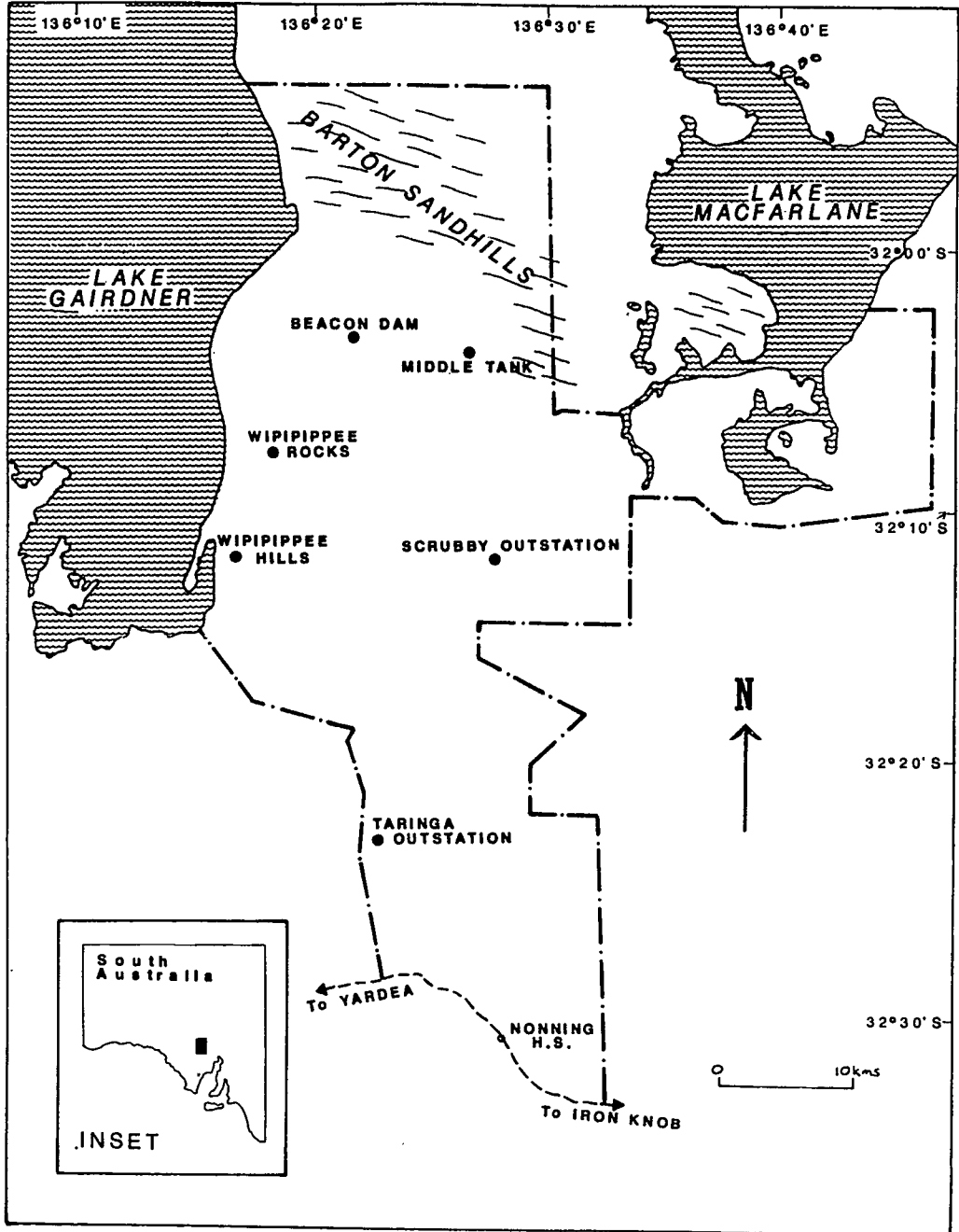


Figure 1. Map of northern portion of Nonning Station. Nonning boundary -----.

15 and 19 June 1991. In all cases the birds were flying east.

To the authors knowledge there are no previous published records of this species in the Gawler Ranges. Bellchambers and Carpenter (1990) found *C. leucocephalus* breeding on Lake Torrens, north-east of Nonning, in May 1989.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

Limosa limosa

Two at a small swamp surrounded by lignum *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii* on 9 November 1991, 5 km NW of Scrubby Outstation. This swamp was filled by rains two weeks previously.

PURPLE-CROWNED LORIKEET

Glossopsitta porphyrocephala

A flock of approximately 10 flying overhead on 1 June 1990, 12 km NE of Scrubby Outstation. Several feeding on flowering *Eucalyptus socialis* in horse mulga and mallee woodland on 31 May 1990, 15 km NE of Beacon Dam.

The nearest record of this species is from Coralbignie, approximately 60 km south of the above localities (Paton 1975).

BOURKE'S PARROT

Neophema bourkii

Between one and three seen on visits 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. These were seen in myall/mulga woodland, typically in areas where *Acacia aneura* rather than *Acacia papyrocarpa* dominated.

A female was flushed from a nest with four eggs in the dead limb of an *Acacia aneura*, 7 km N of Scrubby Outstation on 18 September 1989. A breeding record from visit 2 will be discussed by Allen (in prep.). These are the first breeding records of *N. bourkii* from the Gawler Ranges and the above sightings constitute only the second report of the species in the ranges (Joseph 1984).

ELEGANT PARROT

Neophema elegans

Single *Neophema* parrots were seen flying high overhead on 20 September 1989, 12 km NE of Scrubby Outstation and on 17 June 1991, 2 km S of Beacon Dam. As these gave calls characteristic of *N. elegans* rather than the soft tinkling calls of the Blue-winged Parrot *N. chrysostoma*, they are ascribed to *N. elegans*. The authors are familiar with the calls of the Scarlet-chested Parrot *N. splendida* and confusion with this species was ruled out.

The only other reports of *N. elegans* from the Gawler Ranges are of three records from areas near Scrubby Peak, approximately 150 km SW of the localities mentioned above (Carpenter 1985, 1987; Chapple and Lewis 1991).

SCARLET-CHESTED PARROT

Neophema splendida

A single juvenile was seen at close quarters in mulga/mallee woodland on 28 May 1990, 2 km S of Middle Tank.

Previous records from the ranges have been from mallee woodland at least 150 km SW of this locality (Carpenter 1987; Joseph and Black 1983). This record is also interesting in that *Triodia* was not present in the area. *N. splendida* is usually found in mallee woodland with a *Triodia* ground cover (Blakers *et al.* 1984).

FAN-TAILED CUCKOO

Cuculus pyrrhophanus

Two observed in myall/mulga woodland at Wipipippee Rocks on 2 June 1990. There are only two substantiated records of this species, from the south-west of the ranges (Paton 1975).

GROUND CUCKOO-SHRIKE

Coracina maxima

A total of 10 records, of between two and six individuals on visits 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7. Almost all records were from myall woodland except for three adults and three juveniles seen in open *Acacia aneura* woodland on lateritic hills on 9 November 1991, 6 km NE of Scrubby Outstation.

Joseph and Black (1983) state that *C. maxima* has not been recorded in the ranges since the early 1970s. These records, along with observations mentioned by Robinson *et al.* (1988), indicate that the species is present in small numbers and breeding in the ranges.

GOLDEN WHISTLER

Pachycephala pectoralis

A record of a single individual (Carpenter 1985) seen on 29 August 1985, 5 km NW of Scrubby Outstation was discussed by Paton (1986).

CHESTNUT QUAILTHRUSH

Cinclosoma castanotum

Two were seen in horse mulga/mallee woodland on 18 September 1989, 2 km S of Middle Tank. There have been very few sightings of this species (Joseph and Black 1983) and this record represents

an eastward extension of *C. castanotum* in the ranges.

CINNAMON QUAILTHRUSH

Cinclosoma cinnamomeum

Three in myall woodland on 18 September 1989, 6 km N of Scrubby Outstation, one in chenopod shrubland on 15 June 1991, 3 km SW of Scrubby Outstation and two in chenopod shrubland on 9 November 1991, 7 km E of Scrubby Outstation.

The paucity of our records, despite intensive searches in suitable habitat, would support the view of Robinson *et al.* (1988) that this is an uncommon species in the ranges.

THICK-BILLED GRASSWREN

Amytornis textilis

A total of eight records including two grasswrens seen on visits 1 and 2, 4 km NNE of Scrubby Outstation. All other records were of between two and five birds (including juveniles) at several locations on visit 7. All records were from chenopod shrubland or myall woodland, usually where dense stands of dead finish *Acacia tetragonophylla* surrounded dams or drainage lines. Birds were often located on visit 7 by a distinctive song.

Joseph and Black (1983) refer to a small number of records in the eastern Gawler Ranges, including two records on Nonning Station. *A. textilis* was also reported at several locations on Kolendo and Nonning Stations in 1985 (Robinson *et al.* 1988).

REDTHROAT

Sericornis brunneus

A total of 11 records of between one and four birds on visits 4, 5, 6, and 7. Adults with two juveniles 5 km NW of Scrubby Outstation in lignum *Muehlenbeckia cunninghamii* on 18 September 1989. All other records were from chenopod shrubland or myall woodland. See comments below for Calamanthus.

WESTERN CALAMANTHUS

Sericornis campestris

A total of seven records on visits 4, 6 and 7, all from chenopod shrubland. A bird was flushed from a nest with two eggs in a low *Atriplex* on 18 September 1989, 4 km N of Scrubby Outstation.

Paton (1975) and Joseph and Black (1983) list few records of the Redthroat and Calamanthus in the ranges. In a three week survey in 1985, a total of 29 observations of Redthroat and 32 observations

of Calamanthus were made in chenopod shrubland in the eastern Gawler Ranges (Robinson *et al.* 1988). These and our records show that both species are found in small numbers in suitable habitats on Nonning and surrounding stations.

SLENDER-BILLED THORNBILL

Acanthiza iredalei

A full report on the ecology and status of this species in South Australia is forthcoming (Matthew in prep.). During the period covered by this article, 12 records of between two and five birds were obtained from several localities on visits 4, 5, 6 and 7. These were in chenopod shrubland or myall woodland.

RED WATTLEBIRD

Anthochaera carunculata

One heard at Wipipippee Rocks on 3 June 1990 and two feeding in flowering *Amyema quandang* at Wipipippee Hills on 17 June 1991. These records represent a north-eastward extension in the distribution of this species in the ranges. Both records were from myall/mulga woodland dominated by *Acacia papyrocarpa*.

YELLOW-PLUMED HONEYEATER

Lichenostomus ornata

Several on 30 May 1990, 3 km S of Beacon Dam in tall mallee woodland. At least 20 were seen on visit 6 at the same locality. Paton (1975) also recorded this species near here in 1973.

BROWN-HEADED HONEYEATER

Melithreptus brevirostris

A group was seen on 30 May 1990, 3 km S of Beacon Dam in tall mallee woodland and several were recorded on 31 May 1990 in horse mulga/mallee woodland, 15 km NE of this locality.

This is a north-eastward extension in the distribution of this species in the ranges.

TAWNY-CROWNED HONEYEATER

Phylidonyris melanops

A single bird was seen at close quarters on 16 June 1991, 3 km S of Beacon Dam in tall mallee woodland.

The nearest published records are from vegetation on rocky outcrops in the far west of the ranges (Carpenter 1985, 1987; Robinson *et al.* 1988). This record represents a north-eastward extension for the ranges.

SILVEREYE

Zosterops lateralis

One seen on 20 June 1991, 6 km SW of Beacon Dam in native pine woodland. Previous records of this species in the ranges are from at least 50 km S of this locality (Paton 1975; Robinson *et al.* 1988).

DISCUSSION

The observations presented in this article provide information on the avifauna of a little known region of the Gawler Ranges. Several birds occurring in mallee habitats to the south and south-west (Rufous Treecreeper *Climacteris rufa*, Western Yellow Robin *Eopsaltria griseogularis*, Southern Scrub-Robin *Drymodes brunneopygia* and White-eared Honeyeater *Lichenostomus leucotis*) were not recorded in our study area. The apparent absence of these species combined with the records of Red Wattlebird, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater and Chestnut Quailthrush amplify our knowledge of the distribution of mallee birds in the ranges.

Brooker *et al.* (1979), and Joseph and Black (1983) have suggested that the degradation of chenopod shrublands by overgrazing has caused a decline in the populations of several bird species. The fact that we encountered the Redthroat, Calamanthus and Slender-billed Thornbill at numerous localities indicates that grazing has not had a disastrous effect on these species in the study area. Most of our records of these species were made on visit 7, when a concerted effort was made to search chenopod shrublands. The authors are assessing the habitat requirements of birds frequenting chenopod shrublands in pastoral areas of South Australia.

Despite searches at the same localities on previous visits, virtually all records of the Thick-billed Grasswren were made on visit 7. In a given area, the population size of this species is known to vary greatly with time (Brooker 1988; L. Pedler pers. comm.). It is interesting to note that the study area received less rainfall in 1991 (when Thick-billed Grasswren numbers were high) than in either of the previous two years.

Pedler (1992) has mentioned the possibility of the Chestnut-breasted Whiteface *Aphelocephala pectoralis* occurring on rocky outcrops at Nonning Station. We have spent many hours searching for this species in potentially suitable habitat in our study area without success. Nonetheless, further searches for this species are warranted.

Finally, it is recommended that the areas immediately north of Lakes Everard, MacFarlane and Gairdner (see map in Joseph and Black 1983) be investigated as there is virtually no published information on the avifauna of these regions.

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