

CORRESPONDENCE

THE IDENTIFICATION OF FOUR BIRD SPECIES FROM BRINDANA GORGE, NORTHERN FLINDERS RANGES. We have received a number of queries regarding the correct identification of four species recorded in Peter Hornsby's paper, 'Records of birds seen at Brindana Gorge, in the North Flinders Ranges, South Australia' (*South Australian Ornithologist*, 32, 118-127). The following is an excerpt from Peter Hornsby's response (letter dated 7 August 1997) explaining his identification of these species which have seldom or never previously been recorded in the region. No further correspondence on this matter will be published—Eds.

GREY-HEADED HONEYEATER *Lichenostomus keartlandi*

'For my recognition, the major features were the striking black and bright yellow of the

plume, both of which are strong and contrasting colours, and especially the up-turned crescent shape. The yellow chest and grey head were somewhat less distinctive features.

'The three similar species that have been found in the same habitat are the White-plumed Honeyeater *L. penicillatus*, the Grey-fronted Honeyeater *L. plumulus* and the Singing Honeyeater *L. virescens*. In the river red gum [*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*] canopy, the first two are not easy to differentiate from the Grey-headed Honeyeater, especially with such active birds which are similar sized. However, seen close to (as they were when the Grey-headed Honeyeater was first identified) the cheek plumes are quite distinctive.

'They initially caught the eye because they were so obviously different from the common white-plumed Honeyeater, and were around long

enough for a thorough check. The two recorded were seen together, on June 28, 1994. They were not seen again during the same visit (which lasted until 2/7/94). The area was visited again in June 1995, May, August and September 1996, and June 1997. Two more were seen once during the August 1996 visit, but no other observations have been recorded. The fact that they were seen once only on each visit emphasises firstly their itinerancy and secondly the unlikelihood of observing them, which could account for the sparsity of observations in what must be near or at the southern edge of their zone. The habitat where they were observed fits the generally noted requirements of a rocky sandstone gorge with water and river red gums, and the general absence of these could facilitate concentrating the birds into discrete areas. From Brindana Gorge northwards, there is a huge gap before reaching the southern limits of the central Australian gorges.'

SINGING BUSHLARK *Mirafra javanica* and SKYLARK *Alda arvensis*

'Identification of the Singing Bushlark was a slightly simpler proposition in that when seen they are on the flat top of the hill on the edge of which my Research Unit is located. Thus when they are present they frequently are seen several times during a visit. However, they are never common, and only rarely occur as more than single individuals.

'The Singing Bushlark, Skylark and Richard's Pipit *Anthus novaeseelandiae*, have all been recorded near the research unit. Differentiating between them has not been easy. Richard's Pipit prefers the edge of the reasonably flat hilltop, whereas the Singing Bushlark has been seen more towards the central flatter parts, especially towards the northern side of the hilltop. The initial identification of the Singing Bushlark was by Colin Rich, when it was seen running across the hilltop. Subsequent observations I have made, and spent a lot of time over, because these are three species I find hard to differentiate. For my observations, prime identification

features for the Singing Bushlark are the small size, short downward tail with white margins, no tail-bobbing as with Richard's Pipit, and the short finch-like beak.

'The Skylark was a particularly odd identification because it was seen in December 1994, a relatively dry year. It actually was seen from inside the research unit as it sat on a nearby rock. It was where one would expect to see Richard's Pipit. It was the appropriate size for either, and had the fine beak, but my differentiation was based primarily on the raised crest. The identification could have been wrong but I don't think it was.'

SQUARE-TAILED KITE *Lophoictinia isura*

'This is the only species queried that has previously been reported in records I have seen for the vicinity. Ian May included it in his [unpubl.] list of birds for the Arkaroola-Mount Painter Sanctuary and Lake Frome area, a copy of which I have included for your [editorial] records.

'Black Kites are common, and tend to drift around the research unit. The unit is 100 m above the adjacent gorge, so they are going past at round about eye level or slightly above, which makes them easy to spot, so if anything is slightly different, it tends to stand out. Mostly they are dark but occasionally there is a lighter morph. The lighter ones receive closer attention because such a bird can be any one of four species, namely the Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides*, Whistling Kite *Haliastur sphenurus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans* or Square-tailed Kite. The dark underwing markings, especially of the secondaries and the continuously dark primaries removes the first two. The problem I find is between the Black Kite and Square-tailed Kite. The only differentiating factor between like morphs is the tail, where the Square-tailed Kite has a more pronounced black band across the end of the tail, and which contrasts with lighter bands higher up, whereas the black bands of the Black Kite are less contrasting. Tail shape of course helps to confirm confusable Black Kites.'

PETER HORNSBY, 7 August 1997