

was highly probable that Yellow-tipped Pardalotes seen on the three days may have been the same birds. On the other hand it is just as likely that other individuals may have been present but were simply overlooked. The whole population may have been made up of small and scattered groups.

In the course of preparing this note I was encouraged to pursue the matter by John Woinarski and Shane Parker, and I offer them my sincere thanks. To Stephen Debus for his tolerance and editorial skills I extend my appreciation.

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Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides* Takes Banded Fruit-Dove *Ptilinopus cinctus*

On 25 July 1977 in company with John Estbergs and Tony Hertog I located a small flock of Banded Fruit-Doves *Ptilinopus cinctus* in a rugged gorge c. 200 km south-east of Darwin (Northern Territory). As they were feeding in a large fig tree *Ficus* sp. on the face of the escarpment we set up a hide in order to photograph them. At about 1600 h I was sitting in the hide some 6 m away at eye level and the birds were sitting quietly in the tree under the canopy of leaves. Suddenly there was pandemonium and crashing about in the foliage as the doves panicked, exploded into the air and were gone. In the tree in front of me and well under the canopy was a Little Eagle *Hieraaetus morphnoides* hanging upside down with one of the doves in its talons. For five minutes the eagle hung there, wings out and beak agape, only occasionally lifting its head to examine the dead bird. It then shook itself, dropped to the ground beneath the tree and began to pluck the bird. At this stage I had to move on, causing the eagle to fly across the valley with the prey clasped firmly in its talons. It seemed incredible that the eagle managed to penetrate the rather dense canopy, and I am sure that the doves did not see the eagle until it hit. It must have dived into the tree at great speed.

There are few data on the Little Eagle's diet in the tropics, and this incident suggests how it might obtain some of its prey in tropical forested regions. Previously recorded prey items of the Little Eagle in northern Australia are reptiles: Frilled Lizards *Chlamydosaurus kingii*, Bearded Dragons *Amphibolurus barbatus* and monitor lizards *Varanus* spp. (North 1912, Hall 1974, Slater 1983). To this meagre list may now be added the Banded Fruit-Dove (161-256 g,

averaging 220 g: Hall 1974). Bell (1985) obtained circumstantial evidence that the Little Eagle takes birds in the forests of New Guinea, but he was unable to cite confirmatory observations. The other *Hieraaetus* species inhabiting tropical forests (Ayes' Eagle *H. ayresii* in Africa and Chestnut-bellied Eagle *H. kienerii* in Asia) catch birds by diving swiftly into the forest canopy (Brown & Amadon 1968), and it seems likely that the Little Eagle may behave similarly in parts of Australasia. Recently the New Guinean form *H. m. weiskei* has been described as 'capable of very swift diving flight' (Coates 1985) and 'an inveterate hunter of birds' (Beehler et al. 1986). Further observations on the Little Eagle's diet and hunting behaviour in northern Australia and New Guinea would be valuable.

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Bush-hen *Gallinula olivacea* in the Kimberleys, Western Australia

On 16 August 1985, during the BOC tour to the Mitchell Plateau in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, the group had been driven from the base camp on Camp Creek to the end of the rough road from whence there is a marked track to the Mitchell Falls, some 3-4 km away. The track leads walkers over rough stony terrain, past rocky sandstone breakaways, roughly following a creek whose banks, when not sheer rock, were thick with *Pandanus* sp. and Swamp Melaleuca or Cajuput *Melaleuca* sp. While observing quietly in the vicinity of this creek, Vic Lees and I were sitting by one of the waterholes when a fairly loud, two-note repeated call came from the scrub behind, a call I had not heard before. It was repeated once or twice during the next 15 minutes in the same area. I went to investigate behind the pandanus and small melaleucas where we were sitting. Here was a clear patch of silt and scrub. Suddenly there was a crackling of dry, fallen pandanus leaves. Turning quickly, I just saw the tail end of a rail-like bird disappearing. Vic Lees had also heard the sound and caught a quick glimpse of the bird as it went past. I hurriedly turned back and to avoid being heard, I rock-hopped to where the bird must be seen unless it took to the water or turned back. Reaching the spot I waited. Then from behind another rock came a bird that to me was simply a large rail I had never seen before, larger than a Buff-banded Rail *Rallus philippensis*. It stood motionless, head up, tail down, looking around and in full sun. Its overall colouring was brown with no distinguishing marks at all; it had a long pointed bill and dull yellow legs but no obvious frontal shield. The moment it saw me the bird fled, crackling over the dry leaves and into rocks and grass.