

## The Corellas in Victoria and the Riverina, N.S.W.

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### Introduction

Within the genus *Cacatua* there is a group of small white cockatoos with small crests which range from the Philippines, through New Guinea and adjacent islands to Australia, excepting Tasmania. In Australia they are called "corellas". The Little Corella *C. sanguinea* is usually considered to be a denizen of the hot, arid inland and tropical north, and the Long-billed Corella *C. tenuirostris* only to be found in the more temperate south-east. But both species are extending their range. Another long-billed form, *pastinator*, which occurs in south-western Australia in reduced numbers, has variously been considered a separate species or a sub-species of either *sanguinea* or *tenuirostris*.

The vernacular names of the corellas may have led to mis-identification in the past. Formerly *tenuirostris* was called the Yan Kate or Long-billed Cockatoo, and the Little Corella was named the Bare-eyed (*gymnops*) or Blood-stained (*sanguinea*) Cockatoo. However, the Long-billed species looks just as "blood stained" and there is little difference in size.

There has also been considerable confusion regarding the distribution of the Long-billed Corella. Both Campbell (1900) and North (1911) include north and central Australia in its range but the species seems never to have occurred there. Perhaps this is due to confusion over the vernacular "Blood-stained". For example, Roth (in North) records Long-billed Corellas on the Upper Georgina River in Queensland but does not mention Little Corellas which certainly will have been there.

Long-billed Corellas are not found in Queensland or northern New South Wales. There is a population in The Riverina, that area of south-west New South Wales bounded by the Lachlan River in the north and the Murray in the south.

Apparently separated from the foregoing, another population is found in the Western District of Victoria and the adjacent south-east of South Australia. In the very early days of settlement in Victoria the Long-billed Corella was found around the perimeter of Port Phillip Bay but apparently disappeared before the present century.

Perhaps this disappearance from a district well-known to ornithologists and the absence of reports from the few field-workers elsewhere led to the view that the species was becoming very rare. In 1900 Campbell (*loc. cit.*) wrote, "Years ago thousands used to breed near the Murray River exclusively in the red-gum trees" and went on to say that they had "disappeared or retired towards the interior". In the same book Keartland attributed their reduction in numbers along the Murrumbidgee to the introduction of sheep to former cattle stations and the consequent extermination of native roots and bulbs, major food items of the cockatoos.

Macgillivray also thought that sheep had had the same effect in western Victoria.

It has been suggested that in the past, Long-billed Corella numbers were kept in check when they were inadvertently poisoned by "pickled" seed wheat. This was formerly treated with mercury as a fungicide and the cockatoos ate it when sown. They would also have been deliberately poisoned because of their depredations on cereal crops.

Corellas of both species are ground-feeders, eating bulbs, corms, roots and seeds of all kinds. They even crack the tough cases of "three-cornered jacks" and open wild "paddy melons" in order to gain the seeds inside. Resting birds will defoliate trees by idly nibbling twigs and leaves.

Long-billed Corellas perform a useful service in digging-up the bulbs of the introduced pasture weeds, nut-grass and onion-grass, as they used to do with native yams. Perhaps they were engaged in the same commendable activity when they infuriated the bowlers of Horsham by digging up their playing green during a recent drought!

Farmers do not appreciate their activities in newly-sown or sprouting oat and wheat fields. The long upper beak is not used like a pick or mattock. The birds grasp the soil in both mandibles and throw the divot to one side (pers. obs.). Their faces become very dirty in the process.

Corellas need to drink daily, usually coming to water morning and evening. Strong fliers, they move in noisy flocks for long distances between feeding grounds, watering places and roosting sites. Price Fletcher (in Campbell) followed Little Corellas 20 km. to their drinking pool.

They prefer to roost in large trees adjacent to water. Although both species use hollows in trees for nesting, with the Little Corella also utilising fissures in cliffs and broken-off "ant-hills" (Carter, in North), they are not recorded as using holes for roosting. It is, therefore, interesting to learn from Wild Life Officer, Mr. Paul Kelly (in lit.) that since 1975 Long-billed Corellas have taken to roosting in rabbit burrows near the top of 70-metre cliffs in the extinct volcanic craters of Tower Hill, near Port Fairy, Victoria. Due to the inaccessibility of the burrows, breeding has not been proved.

The view that the Long-billed Corella is under threat of extinction still persists. Forshaw (1969) considered it to be a "declining species" and very recently Pescott (1978) titled an article "Decline of the Corella". Actually, the species is thriving. It is numerous in parts of the Riverina and in great numbers in the Western District whence it has spread into the Wimmera and central Victoria.

It is an interesting coincidence that both Little and Long-billed Corellas are currently expanding their ranges in the south-east of Australia, the region under discussion here. Little Corellas in particular wander a great deal, especially in the non-breeding season or in times of drought. But since the early 1950's they have moved south from western New South Wales into Victoria and, having colonised the comparatively hot north-west, are now appearing in the milder central and north-eastern districts. In some places they are found in association with the Long-billed Corellas moving up from the south. Therefore it is essential to critically examine all flocks in order to ascertain which species are present and not just "identify" them on the grounds of their alleged distribution.

The necessity for close perusal of all corellas was born out when the writer, on July 7, 1978, came upon a flock of white cockatoos feeding in a paddock at Mernda, some 25 km. north of Melbourne. Anticipating that the birds would be the locally common Sulphur-crested (White) Cockatoo (*C. galerita*) and hoping that there might be an odd Long-billed Corella with them, he was not a little surprised to find that not only were there 50 Long-billed Corellas mixed with over 100 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos but also six Little Corellas were foraging with them. Several Galahs

(*C. roseicapilla*) made up an interesting quartet of cockatoo species.

On a subsequent visit to Mernda on July 25, 1978, to confirm these identifications, a few of each species of corella was seen. Since then they have not been seen in the vicinity despite several extensive searches of the district. Apparently they have wandered elsewhere as is their wont.

### Field Identification

Both corellas have a pale yellow wash under tail and wings. The under-surface of the head and neck feathers is pink, the beaks are whitish-horn and a large area of bare blue skin surrounds the eyes.

Both species have small, white erectile crests. That of the Little Corella is larger, forming a small wedge on the fore-part of the crown, about four cm high, comparable in size and shape with that of the Galah. Little Corellas seem to be given to raising their crests much more than the Long-billed species.

The difference in length, approximately 37 cm for the Little and 40 cm for the Long-billed, is not readily apparent in the field. They are both smaller than the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo which is approximately 50 cm long. The latter species' black bill is a useful distinguishing feature when its yellow crest is lowered.

In flight both corellas beat their narrow wings quicker than the broader-winged Sulphur-crested. The high-pitched yelping or chuckling contact calls of the two corellas are very similar although some observers contend that they can be differentiated. Neither species, although capable of discordant squawks, is as harsh as the raucous Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, and in a mixed flock their yelps may be heard rising above the calls of that species.

### Long-billed Corella

The eastern form of the Long-billed Corella, *C. tenuirostris*, found in Victoria and The Riverina, has a conspicuous red bar across the upper breast. The lores and frons are also red, giving a masked effect (these features are absent in *C. pastinator* from south-west Australia).

The upper mandible is long, straight and narrow, giving the species a "flat-faced" look, and is markedly elongated, protruding approximately 2 cm beyond the lower beak which is also long and narrow.

Juveniles have the reddish breast-band and frontal area at the time of fledging, but the bill is said to be shorter than when adult (Lendon, 1973).

### Little Corella

At rest the Little Corella looks completely white except for the yellow wash under the tail and the pink lores which are much less conspicuous than in the red-faced Long-billed Corella.

The upper mandible is short, broad and round, barely overlapping the lower and give the birds a rounded facial silhouette.

### Little Corella — Historical

On his second voyage to north-west Australia, in 1699, William Dampier, the buccaneer, saw "a sort of white parrot which flew a great many together". This is the first known mention of cockatoos for the Australian mainland. They would have been Little Corellas (Serventy & Whittell, 1948). The type specimen was collected by John Gilbert at Port Essington, Northern Territory, during his stay there in 1840-1841 (Gould, 1842). About the same time Captain Sturt recorded the species during his enforced stay at Depot Glen in central Australia.

The Little Corella does not appear in the first list of Victorian birds published by "W.J." in *The Australasian*, December 30, 1965 (*pers. com.* W. R. Wheeler), nor in that of Forbes-Leith & Cambell in *"The Victorian Naturalist"*, 1884. A. J. Campbell (*loc. cit.*) also excludes Victoria from the distribution of the species while Keartland (in North) gives Broken Hill, New South Wales, as the southern limit of its range.

G. Krefft accompanied W. Blandowski on a collecting expedition to the Murray and lower Darling Rivers. He reported Blood-stained and Sulphur-crested Cockatoos "in swarms" at Maiden's Station, near Echuca, in January, 1857 (Blandowski, 1857; Iredale & Whitley, 1932). The "Blood-stained Cockatoos" were probably Long-billed Corellas which seem to have always inhabited that part of the Murray Valley. The identification of the birds as Little Corellas was apparently not accepted by Campbell, a Victorian, who would have been aware of Krefft's records.

However, the *"Catalogue of Specimens"* in the National Museum of Victoria lists four specimens of the "Blood-stained Cockatoo" (no longer in the collection), as having been procured on Blandowski's expedition. It is not clear where they were collected. It is remarked in *The Catalogue* that the cockatoos "fed on the salt-bush plains whence they returned in the evening to the riverside . . ." which suggests western New South Wales. Blandowski had travelled up the Darling as far as Mount Murchison Station in the vicinity of Wilcannia, typical *sanguinea* habitat and presumably they were Little Corellas.

Another 50 years was to elapse before the next southern report of possible Little Corellas — that of Ford (1908) who saw "small Corellas (*C. gymnops*) going south" at Marong, near Bendigo, Victoria. Then O'Donohue (1915) observed Blood-stained Cockatoos (*C. sanguinea*) feeding on exposed waterweed *Vallisneria* in Lake Mournpool, now part of the Hattah Lakes National Park in north-west Victoria. If correctly identified, they may have been wandering birds from New South Wales but Long-billed Corellas have been reported at Euston, New South Wales, and Lake Albacutya, Victoria (see below).

### **Long-billed Corella — Historical**

The type specimen was collected in Port Phillip Bay in 1802 by Robert Brown, naturalist with Captain Matthew Flinders in the *"Investigator"*. There is some debate regarding the precise type locality. Dickison (1928; 1929) states that the datum ticket gives the location as the You Yang Ranges on the west-side of the Bay. However, Brown in his journal (Willis, 1956) wrote that he saw "the *Psittacus Banksii*, a new white-crested species" while climbing Arthur's Seat on Mornington Peninsula on the eastern shore and this is usually quoted as the site where the bird was collected.

The species was subsequently reported from various places around the Bay before disappearing from the district. Hume and Hovell, the overland explorers, "shot a white cockatoo . . . red underneath to the skin" on December 18, 1824, near the You Yangs, and James Backhouse, on a visit to the infant village of Melbourne in November, 1837, saw "round-headed white cockatoos (Dickison, 1931).



The "Old Bushman", H. W. Wheelwright (1861) who worked within 70 km. of Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula in the 1850's, wrote that "the *Yan Kate*, a bird nearly as large as the white cockatoo . . . dirty white . . . no crest . . . down rose-coloured . . . was not very common". It was usually in pairs or occasional small flocks. Wheelwright's description of the "Yan Kate" matches that for *tenuirostris* whereas the "corella" in his book is the cockatoo we know today as the Gang-gang *Callocephalon fimbriatum*.

The National Museum of Victoria's "Old Collections Register" records that one Henelle had deposited specimens of *tenuirostris* from Westernport (? Mornington Peninsula) in 1861, also others from the Murray River in 1863.

In 1829-1830 Captain Charles Sturt collected "a small white cockatoo on the banks of the River Murray". It will have been somewhere west of the confluence with the Murrumbidgee which he had descended on his epic whale-boat passage to the mouth of the Murray and return. Stenhouse (1930) found the specimen in the Museum of Edinburgh University, Scotland, and identified it as *tenuirostris*. Mr. I. H. J. Lister (in lit., 11-10-78) has kindly confirmed Stenhouse's finding, sketching and remarking on the distinctive beak of the now very dilapidated specimen. This is the first record for the Murray Valley-Riverina population.

Keartland (in North, *loc. cit.*) stated that when parts of The Riverina near the Murrumbidgee were used as cattle stations "Long-billed Cockatoos bred there in hundreds but during the past 35 years (i.e. 35 years prior to 1911) cattle had been replaced by sheep and the birds had deserted the vicinity completely". Bennett also informed North that he saw the species "frequently along the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan in immense flocks".

Although the Lachlan is usually considered to be the northern limit for the species, a specimen in the "H. L. White Collection", N.M.V., was collected at Byrock, another 350 km. north, in 1917. Was it a vagrant or escaped cagebird?

The only other early note for the Murray Valley is that of Stone (1912) who wrote in his reminiscences that corellas (*nasica*) had been very rare in the preceding 18 years at Lake Boga, Victoria.

Charles French, Senr. (1888) saw "a few specimens of the Long-billed Cockatoo (*nasica*) in the Lake Albacutya district". This is a singular record for either corella for that period in north-west Victoria. Does it represent a connecting link along the old Wimmera River system between the Murray Valley and western Victorian populations?

Long-billed Corellas were widely scattered through the Western District of Victoria after 1900. Their status before then is unknown. The first mention would seem to be that of Hill (1903) who reported "immense numbers" on the edge of the Otway Ranges. Mulder (in Belcher, 1914) had also seen large flocks at Bamba in the same district. Further west, Geo. Graham of Scott's Creek, near Cobden, wrote to Stephens (1903; 1904) that "since 1900 a small flock of Long-billed Cockatoos had joined our White Cockatoos, have bred for two seasons and are increasing". He later saw more than 70 near Cobden and others at Curdie's Creek.

Further west again on Kaladbro Station near Casterton, A. F. D'Ombrain (1906) recorded pairs and small parties while Macgillivray (in

North) recorded them at Hamilton where egg-laying commenced at the end of August.

### Little Corella — Recent

Apart from the few somewhat dubious records mentioned in the Historical section, the first authenticated sightings of Little Corellas in Victoria were made in the dry north-west in 1951. The Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union held a camp in the Hattah Lakes National Park in October of that year and recorded three parties (Jones, 1952). An earlier account of the area by Jones (1942) merely lists the species, but does not elaborate on its status or the source of information — perhaps it originated in O'Donohue's observations in 1915 (*loc. cit.*).

There has since been a steady expansion in range and numbers. The Bird Observers' Club camped at Lake Hattah in April, 1962, and 200 Little Corellas were seen nearby (Wheeler, 1962). The 1977 National Parks Services' bird list for Hattah gives the species status as "Flocks. Irregular".

Hobbs (1961) in a survey of the birds of The Riverina observed during his residence there from 1954 to 1959, did not find Little Corellas further east than Euston, about 50km. north-east of Hattah. As he travelled west along the Murray Valley he found them "reasonably common", becoming "almost abundant" along the lower Darling (Bandowski's collecting site?).



Little Corella

Favaloro (1972) was banding large numbers of birds at Merbein, near Mildura, in 1961. One of his ringed birds was recovered nearly 10 years later, showing that some birds were sedentary.

Simpson (1973) recorded a flock of about sixty on the Murray River frontage between Moorna Station, New South Wales, and Keera Station, Victoria, which are opposite each other, and very close to the Darling River Anabranch, New South Wales, on November 19, 1968.

B. and D. Snape could report sixty Little Corellas at Lindsay Point, north-west Victoria, near the South Australian border, in September, 1970, and Sharrock saw one hundred at Robinvale in April of the same year (Wheeler, 1972). In a recent letter, Mr. C. Sonter reports seeing 800-1000 at Ryan's Swamp, 25 km. south-west of Mildura, in early 1978, an indication of how their numbers have multiplied in the western sector of the Murray Valley. Oddly, there are no records for the central Riverina.

Further south, in Wyperfeld National Park, Tarr (1971) had "three records of small parties in the area during October sojourns in 1954, 1964 and 1966. Now resident in the park, but move about a lot in the taller forest".

Mr. F. Noelker, of Rainbow, wrote (in lit. September, 1978) that he had not seen Little Corellas south of Wyperfeld until about mid-1977. Then in March, 1978, he recorded a flock of 60-70 just north of Lake Albacutya. His most southerly record to the time of writing is for 15 birds mixed with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos about 12 km. south-west of Rainbow during May, 1978. He had been informed that Little Corellas nested at Maiden's Flat in the park in 1976.

Hately (1970) considered Little Corellas to be "accidental" at Kiata, on the northern edge of the Little Desert. In August, 1978, Mr. M. Pagon (pers. comm.) saw four or five feeding on fallen oats at the Kiata grain silos and about three more at nearby Nhill. In both instances they were with Long-billed Corellas.

About 80 km. to the south-west, an isolated group of 15 Little Corellas was established at Dahleen, near Horsham, between 1970 and 1973 when Mr. L. Jones (pers. comm.) was resident there. Long-billed Corellas had not invaded the district at that time.

An even more unusual record is that of Robinson, who had a flock of 40-50 birds under observation at the You Yang Ranges, near Geelong, during August and September, 1962 (Wheeler, 1963). Little Corellas had never been reported anywhere near the district, nor have they been since. Presumably it is another instance of a wandering flock.

In the central Murray Valley, Messrs. F. Disher and E. Thomas saw Little Corellas for the first time near Barham in 1962 (P. Disher, *in lit.*). Their initial record was for several pairs in October, 1962. There followed four, October 2, 1963; one, October 2, 1965; 40, October 10, 1966; 2, May 7, 1970; and 2, January 16, 1974. A flock of 44 was counted December 19, 1977. Now they are often seen.

At nearby Mystic Park, Mr. T. Lowe first recorded the species in August, 1967 (pers. comm.). "Mobs" were also seen at Appin in the lower Loddon Valley, in September of the same year. Small flocks have been seen about Mystic Park and the adjacent Kerang Marshes fairly regularly since the initial record. In March, 1975, "some hundreds"

appeared at Little Lake Bael Bael, part of the Kerang Marsh system, on the Avoca River. After feeding on local stubbles they moved on, as they so often do. In January, 1979, three fledged young were being fed by two adults in the Marshes.

In its annual report for 1975, the Mid-Murray Naturalists' Trust describes Little Corellas as being "very rare", the species being recorded on a few occasions from the Wakool-Boundary Bend area. Some were also noted with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos at Hayesdale in July, 1975.

A quite dramatic extension of range was recorded on November 11, 1973, when Weston (1974) found a breeding colong of approximately 20 pairs of Little Corellas at Lake Mokoan, the former Winton Swamp, near Benalla, in north-east Victoria. Weston had not seen them in regular visits during the preceding four years.

Little Corellas have also appeared in the Goulburn Valley in recent years. Mr. D. Roberts (in lit.) has records for the Shepparton district — from Arcadia, July 19, 1975; Kialla, August 2, 1975; and Mooroopna, March 13, 1976; and January 12, 1977. On October 15, 1978, he observed 56 birds at Invergordon, east of Numurkah. They were feeding in a ploughed field with Sulphur-crested Cockatoos. Later the two species rested in separate flocks on a channel bank, where close views confirmed the identification of *sanguinea*. *C. tenuirostris* is frequently seen in the district by Roberts.

The presence of Little Corellas at Mernda, near Melbourne, in July, 1978, has been mentioned in the Introduction. Earlier the writer saw two, with a single Long-billed Corella at Templestowe, in the Yarra Valley, on April 23, 1977, and recently two were in a large flock of Sulphur-crested and Long-billed Corellas at Clarkefield, near Sunbury, on June 17, 1979.

Neither species of Corella had been reported from Gippsland until December 30, 1977, when Cross & Irvine (1978), later confirmed by other observers, saw four Little Corellas on the Wingan River in eastern Gippsland, only 50 km. west of the New South Wales border. One can only speculate on the origins of birds so far distant from any other Little Corellas. Isolated by mountainous country which should deter the most eccentric wanderers from the inland plains, perhaps they were aviary escapees which had bred.

### **Long-billed Corella — Recent**

There would appear to be no published records of Long-billed Corellas from the time of Stone's retrospective notes of 1912 (*loc. cit.*) until C. J. Le Soueff (1921) noted "Corellas" at Tallarook — incidentally, the first record for central Victoria.

About the same time "hundreds" were reported between Penola and Wolsely in south-east South Australia (Sutton, 1923), but it was not until 1928 that Sullivan (1928) reported seeing the species in several places in the Western District of Victoria — Moyne Falls, Mortlake, Warrnambool, Macarthur, Hawkesdale and Ellerslie. There were 50-60 birds at the last place.

Sullivan's notes suggest that the cockatoos were widespread, but not being reported. For instance, Watson (1979) recollects that when he lived near Camperdown 60 years ago he usually saw two or three flocks of up to 30 birds on trips into that town, in the period 1917-1920. They were no

longer to be seen when he left the district in the mid-1930's, but he was pleased to see them there once again during a visit in the early 1960's.

There is a specimen in the National Museum of Victoria collected by D. H. Collins at Edenhope in 1935, as well as others from the same place dated 1943 and 1949.

The next Western District report is that of Learmonth (1948), who had been informed of two birds seen at Portland. He remarked that they were very rare there, only appearing at long intervals. In 1952 Learmonth sent a specimen to the Museum from nearby Tyrendara, and Walter (1954) wrote that a few were to be seen in bush country in the same locality. By 1966 Learmonth (1966) was able to write that Long-billed Corellas were common in large flocks in open country north and east of Portland.

In 1949 Urquhart Ramsay (Brown, 1950) wrote in his diary that the appearance of two Corellas on his property, "Turkeith", near Winchelsea, was his only recent record, "but they used to be numerous on the western plains".

Binns (1953), however, could report in the same year, in July, 1949, that there was a flock of several hundred at Terang.

After another ten years, over 70 birds were seen at Camperdown by the F.N.C.V. Fauna Group (*Anon.*, 1960), Hobson (1964) was reporting large flocks between Dunkeld and Port Fairy, and in the same year B.O.C. Easter campers saw flocks of up to 300 at Edenhope. Hodges (Wheeler, 1966) noted 50 at Lismore and there were great flocks reported at the B.O.C. 1967 Easter camp at Wannan, as well as at Dunkeld and Casterton (Wheeler, 1967).

It was about this time that Long-billed Corellas began to increase greatly in numbers and spread north through and beyond the Grampians. The species was not recorded at the B.O.C. Grampians camp, Easter, 1952 (Whitbourn, 1952), and Mr. F. Noelker (in lit., September 12, 1978) says that they were not at Murtoa, near Horsham, when he lived there in 1954. Now they are there in great numbers.

The earliest note for the northern side of the Grampians is that of Irwin (Wheeler, 1966), who saw them nesting south of Horsham in September, 1965.

Mr. L. Jones (in lit.) has records for 1969 and 1970 from several places between Balmoral and Horsham — Miga Lake, September 28, 1969; Telangatuk East, April 3, 1970; Polkemmet, June 21, 1970; Clear Lake, September 30, 1970; and Horsham, January 2, 1971.

In the fifteen months preceding Noelker's letter of September, 1978, the cockatoos had appeared in small numbers at Kiata and Wail in the Little Desert and he has noted 12 at Arkona, just north of Dimboola. The species was not recorded at Dimboola by the B.O.C. during its 1970 Christmas camp (Johnson, 1971).

Tarr (1977) had also noted the gradual spread of Long-billed Corellas in this quarter. In 1975 flocks had moved from near Ararat to the Horsham area and in 1976 could be seen about Dimboola. Mr. M. Pagon (pers. comm.) noted them at Kiata on August 27, 1977, while his observation of four or five at Nhill on August 28, 1977, with Little Corellas, is the most westerly to date. The last were feeding on spilled grain in the railway yards, a bountiful source of food.

In the vicinity of Ararat, the B.O.C. when in camp at Mt. Cole in March, 1973, recorded 30 of the species at Raglan (Deason, 1973).

The bird's presence in the Ballarat district was first recorded by Backen (Wheeler, 1972), who saw four at Creswick in September, 1970. R. Thomas "atlassed" the species at Wallace in January, 1976 (Aston, 1978).

In 1976 Long-billed Corellas first appeared about Newstead, near Castlemaine (Mr. D. Tonkin, in lit.), becoming more numerous in the latter part of 1978. They had bred about 25 km. north. A roadside kill served to identify the species.

Long-billed Corellas have frequented the vicinity of the Brisbane Ranges for some years and have nested at Staughton Vale (Mr. T. Pescott, in lit.). Atlassers M. Gordon and J. Locke logged the species at Anakie in November, 1976 (Aston, *loc. cit.*) and Pescott saw five birds there as recently as December, 1978. D. and G. Cameron, also atlassers, recorded the birds between Toolern Vale and Gisborne in February, 1976.

After no mention in the literature for nearly fifty years, the Riverina population once more came under notice when W. R. Wheeler (1947) reported small flocks at Barmah. Hobbs (*loc. cit.*) also saw them near Barmah in the period 1954-1959. There they were in small numbers, but further down stream they were common near Barham, in the Kondrook Forest. Further north, large numbers of Long-billed Corellas were to be seen in the Werai Forest, between Moulamein and Deniliquin. Hobbs also saw a flock "flying west from Euston" in January, 1957.



Subsequently Hobbs (1969, 1970) reported a pair at Lake Gol Gol, near Mildura in the summer of 1969-1970. Although one bird was eaten by Little Eagles *Hieraetus morphnoides*, a flying juvenile was seen later in the season. An old resident informed Hobbs that the species used to be common at Euston and bred at Gol Gol.

P. Disher (Wheeler, 1963) recorded 300 Long-billed Corellas at Barham. He recalls (in litt.) that they were in the district as far back as 1926. They are still common there.

South of Barham Long-billed Corellas are common in the lower Goulburn Valley. Mr. D. Roberts (in litt.) states that they have been about Kanyapella, north of Tongala, for many years. Mr. J. Fordyce (in litt.) has a report of approximately 800 near Tongala and has seen a pair, probably nesting, in the Waraga Basin. Mr. W. R. Wheeler (in litt.) has records for Nagambie, further south up the valley.

The most recent report for the Riverina is that of Sefton (Rogers, 1973), who saw five of these cockatoos in red gums on the lower River Lachlan, about 40 km. north-west of Hay, in September, 1972. He considered them to be north of their normal range.

In the vicinity of Melbourne, Mr. F. T. H. Smith (pers. comm.) had seen a pair at Kew in the spring of most years from about 1946 to 1951. They were always at the same hollow of a red gum on the banks of the Yarra. In September, 1951, there were two pairs at nesting hollows.

The data sheet of a B.O.C. Unusual Sighting Record, per favour Mr. R. Buckingham, details G. Reed's observation of 27 Long-billed Corellas at Tullamarine Airport on May 18, 1977. Nearby Sulphur-crested Cockatoos gave the opportunity to compare size and voice. The Corellas were there for only a few hours.

A little further to the east Mr. G. Doyle of Mickleham (pers. comm.) had had a flock on his property during September, 1978, but they moved on in October. A sick bird was captured and confirmed identification.

In the Introduction, the writer records having seen 50 Long-billed Corellas near Mernda in July, 1978. Earlier he had seen two at nearby Yan Yean in January, 1977. The late Mrs. Helen Young had informed him of the species' presence in the Yan Yean-Whittlesea area in recent years.

Very recently, on April 20, 1979, a flock of about 20 corellas, several of them certainly Long-bills, were seen by the writer at Somerton as they flew on a steady course east towards Mernda from the direction of Mickleham. Also about 20 Long-billed Corellas, plus two Little Corellas, were seen with a great flock of 500 Sulphur-crested Cockatoos at Clarkefield, a little north of Tullamarine (pers. obs.). It could be that there is a flock of Long-billed Corellas which drifts about the area between Tullamarine and Whittesea, a distance of about 40 km.

In the lower Yarra, Mr. F. Smith (pers. comm.) again saw the species at Kew in June, 1968 (one bird); April, 1977 (one), and February, 1978 (three). The writer's personal observations in the lower Yarra Valley are for a single bird (with two Little Corellas) at Templestowe (April 23, 1977) and two sightings of pairs at Heidelberg on April 2, 1977 and October 29, 1977.

And now, Long-billed Corellas, in their steady expansion of range, have found their way to the other side of Melbourne. On December 21, 1978, Mr. R. Swindly (pers. comm.) saw at least three feeding with Sulphur-



### Long-billed Corellas

Plate 42

Photo by Trevor Pescott

crested Cockatoos at Carrum Downs, about 40 km. south-west of Melbourne. This observation illustrates how corellas can appear in unexpected places. Perhaps we are on the threshold of re-colonisation of the Mornington Peninsula, or an invasion of Gippsland, where Long-billed Corellas have never been known to occur.

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## Some Evidence for a Decline in Population Status of the Regent Honeyeater

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### Introduction

The Regent Honeyeater *Xanthomyza phrygia* (*Melpiphagidae*) is a distinctive bird. Its markings, call and behaviour are such that it is unlikely to be misidentified by observers. Even juvenile birds, with their yellow bills, are not prone to be confused with other species. Because its identification is not normally a problem, one must treat with concern opinions that the Regent Honeyeater is not being observed as frequently now as in earlier times.

Gordon Clarke (*Bird Observer* 567, Feb. 1979) noted its disappearance from Linton, Victoria, in 1923. More recently he saw only one bird in Bendigo and was unable to find it in other parts of Victoria and New South Wales, where previously it had been reported as common. The Bendigo Field Naturalists' Club and the Bird Observers' Club are at present setting up a joint survey of its population status as a result of concern at its apparent decline in the Bendigo region, formerly a stronghold of the species. This article presents some of the data on the Regent Honeyeater, contained in *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, which suggests that there has been a real decline in the frequency of observation of this species in recent years.