

## Birds of La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria

By RICHARD ZANN\*  
INTRODUCTION

This is a progress report on the status of birds at La Trobe University and lists the number of species recorded between 1970 and 1975. Since the University was established in 1967 the environment of the area has changed dramatically and in some cases habitats favourable for birds have been created. This paper records those species that are residents in the area and those transient species that use the area occasionally, with special reference to those using the La Trobe University Wildlife Reserve.

### HABITAT

Before European settlement the area around Bundoora appears to have been a woodland dominated by River Red Gum, *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*, with an understory of Blackwoods, *Acacia melanoxylon*, and a ground cover of Kangaroo Grass, *Themeda australis*. On settlement, the area was cleared and farmed so that by 1967 only a handful of ancient red gums remained scattered over a featureless area of introduced pasture grasses, docks and thistles.

With the establishment of the University, a drainage canal ('the moat') and two ponds were created; an intensive planting program of Australian natives was initiated throughout the campus. An area of 6.5 ha around the ponds was set aside as a Wildlife Reserve with teaching and research as its principal objectives. The list of birds below has been compiled almost exclusively within the area of the Wildlife Reserve. In order to attract a diversity of birds and other animals native to this part of the Yarra Valley, a variety of different habitats have been created.

1. *Red gum woodland*. By the exclusion of grazing and browsing mammals, red gum seedlings have grown thickly and dense patches of saplings are found round the original old trees. Numbers of blackwoods have also been planted.

2. *Eucalypt forest*. In 1967 a total of 840 trees of the following species were established: Mahogany, *Eucalyptus botryoides*, Spotted Gum, *E. maculata*, River Red Gum, *E. camaldulensis*, Silver Wattle, *Acacia dealbata*, Black Wattle, *A. mearnsii*, Green Wattle, *A. decurrens*, and Ovens Valley Wattle, *A. pravissima*. A second forest of 690 plants was established in 1969 and is comprised of Mahogany, Red Gum, Manna Gum, *Eucalyptus viminalis*, Swamp Gum, *E. ovata*, Blackwood, *Acacia melanoxylon* and Cootamundra Wattle, *A. baileyana*.

3. *Grassland*, which consists of Paspalum, *Paspalum dilatatum*, Prairie Grass, *Bromus unioloides*, Rye Grass, *Lolium perenne*, White Clover, *Trifolium subterraneum*, Plantago, *Plantago lanceolata*, Curled Dock, *Rumex crispus* and Sheep's Sorrel, *Rumex acetosella*, covers approximately one fifth of the area.

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4. *Ponds and Swamp*. A naturally occurring rush-filled swamp covers approximately 0.60 ha. Two artificial ponds have been created; a shallow pond 0.23 ha in area with two small islands and a larger deeper pond of 0.64 ha which has one large island. The water level is controlled by a sluice valve at a weir. The shoreline is covered with Bullrushes, *Typha angustifolia*. Spike-rushes, *Eleocharis acuta* and *sphacelata*, sedges, *Cyperus* spp., and rushes, *Juncus* spp. Fallen logs and duck boxes are also scattered along the shore line. Swamp Paperbarks, *Melaleuca ericifolia*, occur higher up the bank.

#### DISCUSSION

One hundred and twenty-four species of wild birds have been recorded for La Trobe University between 1970 and 1975. Considering that only a small area of the campus, namely the Wildlife Reserve, was regularly surveyed, the length of the list suggests that the area is unusually rich in birds. This is not the case; only twenty-eight per cent of species bred in the area and of the non-breeding species recorded over fifty percent were rare and twenty-six per cent were irregular visitors. Fleming (1975) recently compiled a bird list for the Ivanhoe area, eight kilometres south of La Trobe University. The fact that her records were made over the same period (1970-75) as ours makes a comparison interesting. Although Fleming only lists ninety-nine species, over thirty-five per cent were breeding residents; of the non-breeding birds, thirty-seven per cent were rare and forty per cent irregular visitors. In summary, more species visit the La Trobe University area than the Ivanhoe area but a smaller proportion use it for any length of time.

There are a number of factors that contribute to the differences. La Trobe University is closer to the edge of the metropolitan area than Ivanhoe and should expect a greater number of visiting birds, although the Yarra River should also act as flyway for birds that arrive at Ivanhoe. The greater proportion of breeding and resident species at Ivanhoe may be due to the area studied which was four times that surveyed at La Trobe University. Furthermore, the vegetation is more established in the former locality. It is more difficult to explain why La Trobe University should have many species of birds-of-prey, ducks, thornbills and honeyeaters which were not recorded for Ivanhoe. The high incidence of transient species at La Trobe University may be a result of the high density of observers present to detect them so that fewer go unrecorded at the University than at Ivanhoe.

Some of the more notable records for La Trobe University include the following: a flock of ten Plumed Tree-ducks stayed for one day on September 25, 1975. White Goshawks have been recorded on two occasions: during one week in March 1974 and again in late November 1975. Black Falcons were also recorded twice: once in 1970 and again on March 12, 1976. A corpse of a Marsh Crake was found in the swamp in November, 1975. Japanese Snipe, which are considered rather rare (Wheeler,

Common Name	Scientific Name	Area	Occur.	Ivanhoe
*Emu	Dromaius novaehollandiae	WIn		
Little Pied Cormorant	Phalacrocorax melanoleucos	W	I	X
Little Black Cormorant	Phalacrocorax sulcirostris	W	I	X
*Little Grebe	Podiceps novaehollandiae	W	C	X
White-necked Heron	Ardea pacifica	W, O	I	X
*White-faced Heron	Ardea novaehollandiae	A	VC	X
Large Egret	Egreta alba	W	I	X
Little Egret	Egreta garzetta	W	R	
Nankeen Night Heron	Nycticorax caledonicus	W	R	X
Brown Bittern	Botaurus poiciloptilus	W, O	R	
White Ibis	Threskiornis molucca	W, O	I	X
Straw-necked Ibis	Threskiornis spinicollis	W, O	I	X
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Platalea flavipes		F, R	X
Plumed Tree-duck	Dendrocygna eytoni	W	R	
Black Swan	Cygnus atratus	WIn	R	X
*Black Duck	Anas superciliosa	W, O	VC	X
Grey Teal	Anas gibberifrons	W	I	
Chestnut Teal	Anas castanea	WIn	I	X
White-eyed Duck	Aythya australis	W	R	
Wood Duck	Chenonetta jubata	W	R	
*Black-shouldered Kite	Elanus notatus	W, O	C	X
Whistling Kite	Haliastur spheunurus	O	F, R	
White Goshawk	Accipiter novaehollandiae	W	R	
Brown Goshawk	Accipiter fasciatus	W, O	C	X
Collared Sparrowhawk	Accipiter cirrhocephalus	O	R	
Swamp Harrier	Circus approximans	W	R	
Black Falcon	Falco subniger	W, O	F, R	
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus	W, O	F, I	
*Little Falcon	Falco longipennis	W, O	C	X
Brown Falcon	Falco berigora	O	R	
Nankeen Kestrel	Falco cenchroides	A	C	X
Stubble Quail	Coturnix pectoralis	W	R	
King Quail	Excalfactoria chinensis	KIn		
Land Rail	Rallus philippensis	W	R	X
Marsh Crane	Porzana pusilla	W	R	
Dusky Moorhen	Gallinula tenebrosa	W	I	X
Swamp Hen	Porphyrio porphyrio	W	I	X
*Coot	Fulica atra	W	R	X
*Spur-winged Plover	Vanellus novaehollandiae	W, O	C	X
Red-capped Dotterel	Charadrius alexandrinus	W	R	
Japanese Snipe	Gallinago hardwickii	W, O	C	X
Silver Gull	Larus novaehollandiae	W	I	X
*Domestic Pigeon	Columba livia	A	VC	X
Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis	A	C	X
Common Bronzewing	Phaps chalcoptera	W	R	
Rainbow Lorikeet	Trichoglossus haematodus	W	R	
Swift Parrot	Lathamus discolor	W	R	X
Gang-gang Cockatoo	Callocephalon fimbriatum	W, O	R	X
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Cacatua galerita	W	I	X
Galah	Cacatua roseicapilla	W	VC	X
Cockatiel	Nymphicus hollandicus	W	E	X
King Parrot	Aprosmictus scapularis	W	R	X
Crimson Rosella	Platycercus elegans	W	R	X
*Eastern Rosella	Platycercus eximius	W	C	X

Common Name	Scientific Name	Area	Occur.	Ivanhoe
Pale-headed Rosella	Platyercus adscitus	W	E	
*Red-rumped Parrot	Psephotus haematonotus	W	VC	X
Pallid Cuckoo	Cuculus pallidus	W, O	C	X
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Cacomantis pyrrhophanus	W, O	C	X
Black-eared Cuckoo	Chrysococyx osculans	O	R	
Rufous-tailed Bronze-Cuckoo	Chrysococyx basalis	W, O	R	X
Spotted Owl	Ninox novaeseelandiae	W, O	C	X
Barn Owl	Tyto alba	W	I	X
Tawny Frogmouth	Podargus strigoides	W	R	X
Spine-tailed Swift	Hirundapus caudacutus	W	F	X
*Kookaburra	Dacelo gigas	W, O	C	X
Sacred Kingfisher	Halcyon sancta	W	R	X
Dollar Bird	Eurystomus orientalis	W	R	
*Common Skylark	Alauda arvensis	W, O	C	
Welcome Swallow	Hirundo neoxena	W, O	VC	X
Tree Martin	Petrochelidon nigricans	O	R	X
Fairy Martin	Petrochelidon ariel	W, O	I	X
Australian Pipit	Anthus novaeseelandiae	W, O	C	
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	Coracina novaehollandiae	W, O	C	X
Common Blackbird	Turdus merula	W, O	C	X
Song Thrush	Turdus ericetorum	O	I	X
Jacky Winter	Microeca leucophaea	W	R	
Flame Robin	Petroica phoenicea	W, O	VC	X
Scarlet Robin	Petroica multicolor	W	C	
Eastern Yellow Robin	Eopsaltria australis	W	I	X
Golden Whistler	Pachycephala pectoralis	W	C	X
Rufous Whistler	Pachycephala rufiventris	W	I	
Grey Shrike-thrush	Colluricincla harmonica	W	C	X
*Grey Fantail	Rhipidura fuliginosa	W, O	C	X
*Willie Wagtail	Rhipidura leucophrys	W, O	C	X
Restless Flycatcher	Seisura iniqueta	W	R	X
*Clamorous Reed-Warbler	Acrocephalus stentoreus	W, O	VC	X
*Little Grassbird	Megalurus gramineus	W, O	C	X
*Golden-headed Cisticola	Cisticola exilis	W, O	VC	X
*Superb Blue Wren	Malurus cyaneus	W, O	C	X
White-browed Scrub-wren	Sericornis frontalis	W	R	X
*Weebill	Smicornis brevirostris	W, O	I	
Brown Thornbill	Acanthiza pusilla	W	I	X
*Yellow-rumped Thornbill	Acanthiza chrysorrhoa	W, O	C	X
Yellow Thornbill	Acanthiza nana	W	C	
Striated Thornbill	Acanthiza lineata	W	I	
Orange-winged Sitella	Neositta chrysoptera	W	R	
White-throated Trecreeper	Climacteris leucophaea	W	R	
*Red Wattle-bird	Anthochaera carunculata	W, O	C	X
Noisy Miner	Manorina melanocephala	W, O	C	
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	Meliphaga chrysops	W	I	
Fuscous Honeyeater	Meliphaga fusca	O	R	
*White-plumed Honeyeater	Meliphaga penicillata	W, O	C	X
White-eared Honeyeater	Meliphaga leucotis	W	R	
White-naped Honeyeater	Melithreptus lunatus	W, O	I	

Common Name	Scientific Name	Area	Occur.	Ivanhoe
New Holland Honeyeater	Phylidonyris novaehollandiae	W, O	I	X
Eastern Spinebill	Acanthorhynchus tenuirostris	W	R	X
Mistletoe-bird	Dicaeum hirundinaceum	W, O	R	X
*Spotted Pardalote	Pardalotus punctatus	W, O	I	X
*Striated Pardalote	Pardalotus striatus	W, O	C	X
Silvereye	Zosterops lateralis	A	C	X
*European Goldfinch	Carduelis carduelis	A	VC	X
European Greenfinch	Chloris chloris	W, O	C	X
Zebra Finch	Poephila guttata	O	E	
Red-browed Firetail	Aegintha temporalis	W	R	X
*House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	A	VC	X
*Eurasian Tree Sparrow	Passer montanus	A	VC	X
*Common Starling	Sturnus vulgaris	W, O	VC	X
*Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis	W, O	VC	X
Olive-backed Oriole	Oriolus sagittatus	W	R	X
*Australian Magpie-lark	Grallina cyanoleuca	W, O	C	X
Masked Woodswallow	Artamus personatus	W	F	
Pied Currawong	Strepera graculina	W	R	
*Grey Butcherbird	Cracticus torquatus	W, O	C	X
*White-backed Magpie	Gymnorhina hypoleuca	W, O	VC	X
*Little Raven	Corvus mellori	W	VC	X

#### Key to abbreviations and symbols

\* = breeding record, X = recorded by A. Fleming (1975) at Ivanhoe

Area	Occurrence
A = all areas on campus	VC = regular in large numbers
W = Wildlife Reserve	C = regular in small numbers
O = areas adjacent to Reserve	F = flying overhead
WIn = introduced to Reserve	I = irregular in variable numbers
	R = rare, few sightings only
	E = probable escapee

1967), are commonly found in the swamp every spring and summer. A single Dollar Bird was seen on December 12, 1975, being chased by Red-rumped Parrots. Red-rumped Parrots breed in hollow limbs of red gums every year and in 1975-76 raised young in all four duck-breeding boxes around the pond edges.

In 1975 the area of the Wildlife Reserve was increased by two hectares and this area will be eventually trebled in size to approximately twenty-five ha. A new planting program has begun. Seedlings are being raised from local populations of many species of trees and shrubs indigenous to the area. It is hoped that these plants will attract and support many birds. A second program is underway to increase the productivity of the pond ecosystems which have suffered from turbidity caused by the heavy clay in the area. A third program is being carried out by a research student, Mr. Graeme Ambrose, who is studying the effects of adding hollow logs and boxes on the number of hollow-using animals in the reserve. Since 1970 sixteen research projects, mainly on invertebrates, have been carried out in the reserve and it is hoped that such studies will eventually help to establish methods and procedures for attracting and supporting indigenous fauna, especially birds, in urban parks and reserves.

*Xanthorrhoea* flowers

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**Brown Thornbill feeding at *Xanthorrhoea* flowers.** McCulloch (*Australian Bird Watcher*, 6:1, 1975) mentions an instance of a Striated Thornbill, *Acanthiza lineata*, feeding on 'liquid nectar' from a feeder, and this has prompted me to report the feeding behaviour of Brown Thornbills, *A. pusilla*, as observed at Bungwahl, New South Wales.

August 4, 1975 — I observed a Brown Thornbill hopping up the flowering spike of a grass-tree, *Xanthorrhoea australis*, with an action indicative of taking nectar from the flowers. Many birds feed on insects attracted to these flowers and as I was standing several metres from the thornbill I assumed that it was feeding on insects.

August 7, 1975 — I was standing by the same flowering spike watching a spinebill feeding from the flowers when a Brown Thornbill, ignoring my presence, alighted on the spike only one metre from my face. At such close quarters there was no mistaking the actions of the bird as it worked its way up the spike, inserting its bill into flowers as it went. The bill was held in each flower for one to two seconds. After the bird departed I examined closely the flowers but could find no insects; I was quite satisfied the thornbill was taking nectar.

I have noticed that the tongue of *A. pusilla* has a very fine 'brush-like' tip.

*William T. Cooper, Bungwahl, N.S.W.*

Cover Photograph:  
Dusky Woodswallow at nest.

Plate 46

Photo by R. T. Littlejohns

From the B.O.C. Historical Collection.

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