Discussion

We could come to no conclusion as to the coot's fluctuating success rate; however 1977 was a markedly poor breeding season for the other nesting species sharing the irrigation dam habitat. Table 1). Nests of Australasian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* were only 50% of the numbers in the other three years. Clamorous Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* 75% and no Dusky Moorhens *Gallinula tenebrosa* were found nesting. On the other hand the Purple Swamphens *Porphyrio porphyrio,* were as successful as in other years. Possibly adverse environmental factors were involved. The annual rainfall during the four years of the study fluctuated. (Table 4). The lowest, 893.5 mm in 1977, coincided with the year of least success for the breeding coots, also the Australasian Grebe, Dusky Moorhen, and Clamorous Reed-Warbler. The year with the most rain, 1978, 1052.1 mm, was the year with the highest success rate for coots. A similar higher successful percentage shows in Australasian Grebe records, less so for Dusky Moorhen and not at all for Clamorous Reed-Warblers. The variation in rainfall does not affect the initial water level in the dams; they are always full in September and subsequent levels depend on irrigation requirements. Perhaps consistent water levels are a factor in breeding success for coots.

TABLE 4

Annual rainfall in mm and breeding success of coot.

	1975	1976	1977	1978
Annual rainfall	926.9	1020.9	893.5	1052.1
Breeding success %	28.6	34.4	23.2	52.5

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Selective Food Gathering by Australian Magpie

Alley (1979) observed a pair of Australian Magpies *Gymnorthina tibicen,* that fed on cheese while retaining previously selected insects which were later fed to the young.

In the 1972 breeding season, Australian Magpies nested to the north and south-west of Auluba Oval, South Turramurra. A loose flock of non-breeding birds occupied gardens and open spaces to the north-west of the oval, at a somewhat further distance than the two nests.

On 20 September the northern nest contained advanced young. The adult female from this nest was food gathering in my garden with larvae already held in the bill. She dropped this original bundle of food three times to forage and feed herself, picking up the original bundle of larvae before going on with the food search. After the third drop and retrieval, I had an unimpeded view of her flight to the nest where she fed one nestling.

The observation was made without binoculars at a distance of about 3 metres from the foraging bird. I concluded that Australian Magpies are selective in the food which is offered to nestlings.

Reference

Alley, T.H. (1979), 'Diet Difference in Adult and Nestling Australian Magpie', *Corella* 3: 4.

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