AUSTRALIAN BIRD STUDY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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No. 95 **ISSN 0815-5542** **June 2009**

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BEQUESTS

Have you thought of making a bequest to ABSA in your will? There are many ways to make a bequest of any size, that will help ABSA in its work. If you wish to know more, please see the website page <www.absa.asn.au/bequests> or contact the President: <info@absa.asn.au> or write to:
PO Box A313, Sydney, NSW 1235

From the President

Well, we really found out the importance of the scientific day to the attendance at the Association's AGM, with the meeting at Macquarie University failing to achieve a quorum. The meeting was duly adjourned (see below), and we proceeded to have a long discussion on the topics chosen for the consultation and planning day. It turned into a very productive day anyway, and the main structure of our strategic plan was mapped out. All members are invited to the adjourned meeting, where the formalities will be quickly dealt with before an ordinary Committee meeting takes place.

The strategic plan will be further consulted over the coming months, and details will be published in the Newsletter later this year.

Members are assured that the Scientific Day will occur as usual next year.

We note the death of yet another of Australia's leading ornithologists, Dr Ian Rowley, who passed away on May 29, aged 83. Dr Rowley was instrumental in the creation of the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Schemes, which oversees banding studies across Australia. He went on to have a distinguished ornithological career, including the receipt of the inaugural D.L. Serventy Medal. On behalf of the Association, we offer our condolences to his widow, Dr Eleanor Russell.

Stein Boddington

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH GRANTS 2009

The Australian Bird Study Association operates a fund to provide financial assistance to researchers. The fund, known as the ABSA Avian Research Fund, provides grants on an annual basis, but administrative problems prevented the awarding of grants early this year. We took the opportunity to re-align the grant timetable to make it more amenable for students entering research-based studies, and the next allocation will be available in late 2009. The total value of grants is in the order of $2000 and is intended to provide researchers with assistance in the acquisition of equipment and research material.

Expressions of interest for obtaining a grant are now being sought from members of the Association. The Association would like to encourage grant applications from both amateur and professional researchers. Expressions of interest must be in writing, clearly setting out the aims and objectives of the proposed study.

The successful recipients would be encouraged, at the completion of their study, to provide a paper for publication in *Corella* outlining the results of their research.

All applications should be forwarded by 31 October 2009 to:
The Secretary,
Australian Bird Study Association,
PO Box A313,

Sydney South, NSW 1235.

ABSA AGM

Due to the lack of a quorum at the Association's Annual General Meeting on 13 June, 2009, the meeting was adjourned, in accordance with the Association's constitution.

Notice is hereby given that the adjourned Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Saturday 8 August 2009, in Building C5A at Macquarie University, Ryde, NSW, commencing at 10am.

BILL LANE AWARD 2008

This annual award is sponsored by the Association to commemorate the contribution made to Australian ornithology by the late Bill Lane, one of the founding members of the Association. It is an official award of Charles Sturt University, and is presented at the University's award day at the Albury campus.

It is awarded to the outstanding student in ornithology, and consists of a year's membership of the Association and a cash award of $100 (under revision).

In 2008, the award was won by Mr Simon Robinson, of Bundanoon, NSW. We extend a warm welcome to Simon as a new member of the Association, and congratulate him on his achievement.

NSW Ornithological Rarities Advisory Committee

The following sightings were examined by ORAC and accepted in 2008:

Ref.No	Sighted by	Species	Place	Date
443 2007	L.Hyde	Painted Finch	Mount Wood, Tibooburra	07 May
444 2007	M & G Davis	Cotton Pygmy Goose	Swan Creek, Grafton	20 May
445 2007	D. Colbourne	Hardhead	Lord Howe Island	24 Mar
446 2007	D. Thomson	Yellow Chat	White Cliffs	14 Apr
456 2007	F. Valckenborgh	Flock Bronzewing	Sturt N P	25 Sep
457 2008	C. Brandis	Kermadec Petrel	off Wollongong	22 Mar
458 2007	I. McAllan et al	Painted Finch	Menindee (?)	19 Aug

459 2008	B. Jones	Pied Heron	Bega	31 May
463 2008	C. Meadows	L M Sooty Albatross	Port Macquarie	05 Jun

For more information on the Ornithological Rarities Advisory Committee, including forms and procedures for reporting rarities, please visit:

<http://www.cboc.org.au/nsworac.html>

Australasian Ornithological Conference 2009

The Fifth Biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference will be held in Armidale, NSW from the 29 November to 4 December 2009. There will be four days of spoken presentations - Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday with excursions on Wednesday.

There will also be poster presentations. The Australian Bird Study Association Prize for the Best Student Poster at the AOC will be presented. The prize consists of $150 and a year's membership of the Association, including a subscription to Corella.

In particular, students are encouraged to attend. They are offered an "early bird" registration at $150.00 if paid by 1 September.

"Early bird" full registration (1 September) is $AU320.00. After 1 September: student registration is $AU250.00 and full registration is $AU450.00

More information can be obtained at:
<http://www.birdsaustralia.com.au/whats-on/2009-armidale.html>

NSW BIRDS GIVEN A REPRIEVE

A bill sponsored by the Shooters Party failed in the NSW Upper House in early June, when the Government refused to support the idea of allowing shooting of both feral and selected native birds in NSW National Parks. The Shooters Party put it up as the price of their support for the sale of NSW Lotteries, which would have netted the Rees Government sorely-needed revenue.

However, even they recoiled at the idea of shooters blasting away in National Parks at Galahs and other birds.

ANTHONY OVERS BLOG ON BANDING

[Note for the uninitiated: Blog is short for Web Log – an informal account by one person of their activities, thoughts and ideas - in short, a web-based diary, open to all. *Ed*.]

Hi all
If you are interested, I have just started a blog about my bird banding trips. I am involved in several projects in Australia. The blog is a convenient way of keeping various people updated with what we've been doing (in particular, the rangers responsible for the parks we work in!).

The address is <http://birdbander.blogspot.com/ > Any feedback welcome

Anthony Overs Canberra, Australia

SOME INTERESTING PAPERS

MOULT PATTERNS AND BODY SIZE

Author Summary

The pace of life varies with body size and is generally slower among larger organisms. Larger size creates opportunities but also establishes constraints on time-dependent processes. Flying birds depend on large wing feathers that deteriorate over time and must be replaced through molting. The lengths of flight feathers increase as the 1/3 power of body mass, as one expects for a length-to-volume ratio. However, feather growth rate increases as only the 1/6 power of body mass, possibly because a two-dimensional feather is produced by a one-dimensional growing region. The longer time required to grow a longer feather constrains the way in which birds molt, because partially grown feathers reduce flight efficiency. Small birds quickly replace their flight feathers, often growing several feathers at a time in each wing. Larger species either prolong molt over two or more years, adopt complex patterns of multiple feather replacement to minimize gaps in the flight surface, or, among species that do not rely on flight for feeding, simultaneously molt all their flight feathers. We speculate that the extinct 70-kg raptor, *Argentavis magnificens*, must have undergone such a simultaneous molt, living off fat reserves for the duration.

Reference: Rohwer S, Ricklefs RE, Rohwer VG, Copple MM (2009) Allometry of the Duration of Flight Feather Molt in Birds. PLoS Biol 7(6): e1000132. doi:10.1371/ journal.pbio.1000132

MIRROR-INDUCED BEHAVIOR IN THE MAGPIE (*Pica pica*): Evidence of Self-Recognition

Comparative studies suggest that at least some bird species have evolved mental skills similar to those found in humans and apes. This is indicated by feats such as tool use, episodic-like memory, and the ability to use one's own experience in predicting the behavior of conspecifics. It is, however, not yet clear whether these skills are accompanied by an understanding of the self. In apes, self-directed behavior in response to a mirror has been taken as evidence of self-recognition. We investigated mirror-induced behavior in the magpie, a songbird species from the crow family. As in apes, some individuals behaved in front of the mirror as if they were testing behavioral contingencies. When provided with a mark, magpies showed spontaneous mark-directed behavior. Our findings provide the first evidence of mirror

self-recognition in a non-mammalian species. They suggest that essential components of human self-recognition have evolved independently in different vertebrate classes with a separate evolutionary history.

Author Summary

A crucial step in the emergence of self-recognition is the understanding that one's own mirror reflection does not represent another individual but oneself. In nonhuman species and in children, the "mark test" has been used as an indicator of self-recognition. In these experiments, subjects are placed in front of a mirror and provided with a mark that cannot be seen directly but is visible in the mirror. Mirror self-recognition has been shown in apes and, recently, in dolphins and elephants. Although experimental evidence in nonmammalian species has been lacking, some birds from the corvid family show skill in tasks that require perspective taking, a likely prerequisite for the occurrence of mirror self-recognition. Using the mark test, we obtained evidence for mirror self-recognition in the European Magpie, *Pica pica*. This finding shows that elaborate cognitive skills arose independently in corvids and primates, taxonomic groups with an evolutionary history that diverged about 300 million years ago. It further proves that the neocortex is not a prerequisite for self-recognition.

Reference: Prior H, Schwarz A, Güntürkün O (2008) Mirror-Induced Behavior in the Magpie (*Pica pica*): Evidence of Self-Recognition . PLoS Biol 6(8): e202. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio. 0060202

INDIAN MYNAS PURGED

One Sydney council has taken to heart the previously held belief that Indian Mynas are responsible for the decline in native bird species in our suburban landscape. Nick Soon, of the St Marys-Mt Druitt Star, wrote (June 9, 2009) that Blacktown Council and the University of Western Sydney's Native and Pest Animal Unit have jointly trialed an Indian Myna Eradication Scheme which saw the capture of 530 Mynas and 239 starlings in the suburbs of Blacktown, Kings Langley, Glenwood, Lalor Park, Marayong and Stanhope Gardens.

The trial cost $74 for each starling, and $107 for each Myna caught and destroyed. The ongoing program is estimated to cost $135,000 per year. The new phase of the Scheme will involve more analysis, mapping the spread of the Myna population, the testing of different baits and community education.

The one veterinarian on the council, Russ Dickens, believes it is an exercise in futility. He said: "Based on this figure, the council would have to spend $20 millian to get rid of 200,000 birds over 1,400 years. We have to look at better ways to eliminate these birds. An offer of a bounty of 10 cents per bird would be more effective than hiring out traps."

Mayor Charlie Lowles disagreed, and said the trial was a success, and provided useful information on the habits of Mynas, and the success of various traps used.

DARWIN'S FINCH JOINS THE RED LIST

It would have Darwin turning in his grave, to hear that one of his Finches in the Galapagos Islands has been listed in the Red List of critically endangered bird species. In New Scientist 16 May 2009, it is reported that the Medium Tree Finch has joined 191 other birds on the list, published by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Medium Tree Finch is in jeopardy as a result of parasitic flies introduced to the islands by humans, while most others are imperilled by habitat loss.

Only 1660 individuals remain of the Medium Tree Finch, which is endemic to the Island of Floreana in the Galapagos.

Birdlife International report that there is good news within the latest list as well, with species improving their listing as recovery programs are put into place. It cites an Australian example, where Albert's Lyrebird *Menura alberti*, confined to a relatively small area of rainforest between Blackwall Range, New South Wales, and Mistake Range, Queensland, has been downlisted from Vulnerable to Near Threatened.

BIRD PHOTOS

See some lovely bird photos at <http://www.birdway.com.au>

NOISY MINERS AND GARDEN PLANTINGS

The latest edition of Emu carries a paper that discusses whether high nectar producing plants such as grevilleas, contribute to the proliferation of Noisy Miners in the urban environment. Here's the abstract:

Ashley L.C., R. E. Major and C. E. Taylor (2009) **Does the presence of grevilleas and eucalypts in urban gardens influence the distribution and foraging ecology of Noisy Miners?** *Emu* **109**: 135-142

Noisy Miners aggressively exclude small bird species from an ever-increasing range of human-dominated landscapes including suburban gardens. They are therefore an important cause of decline of bird diversity in cities. One popular explanation for the expansion of Noisy Miner populations into suburban areas is that the growing popularity of native gardens that include long-flowering hybrid grevilleas with high nectar production, has resulted in an abundance of resources for Noisy Miners. To determine whether a relationship exists between the distribution of Noisy Miners and the vegetation composition of suburban gardens, we compared the abundance and foraging behaviour of Noisy Miners in gardens with and without grevilleas and eucalypts. Contrary to popular expectation, there was no significant association between the abundance of Noisy Miners and the presence of hybrid grevilleas but there was a highly significant relationship between the abundance of Miners and the presence of eucalypts. Noisy Miners also spent substantial amounts of time foraging on open ground. This study does not support the notion that hybrid grevilleas have played a causal role in the spread of Noisy Miners across many suburban areas of eastern Australia. Our results are consistent with the hypothesis that it is the proliferation of lightly-treed open areas that favours the Noisy Miner.

BIRD MIGRATIONS SET TO INCREASE

Posted on the "Wings over Wetlands" news site: < http://wow.wetlands.org>

Cambridge, 28 May 2009 - Bird migrations are likely to get longer according to the first ever study of the potential impacts of climate change on the breeding and winter ranges of migrant birds. The length of some migrations could increase by as much as 400 km. "The predicted future temperature changes and the associated changes in habitat could have serious consequences for many species", said lead-author Nathalie Doswald of Durham University (UK).

posted @ Thursday, May 28, 2009 2:10 PM by Florian Keil from UNEP/AEWA

RED-TAILED BLACK COCKATOOS REHABILITATED

http://www.dec.wa.gov.au - 9TH June 2009

'Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) wildlife officers and volunteers today conducted the State's largest release of forest red-tailed black cockatoos into the wild. Seven forest red-tailed black cockatoos (*Calyptorhynchus banksii naso*), which were last week added to the Commonwealth Threatened Species List by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett, were released at the Black Cockatoo Rehabilitation Centre in Martin, WA.

DEC wildlife officer Rick Dawson said the cockatoos all originated from the same area and had been at the rehabilitation centre for up to a year.

"Six of the cockatoos were brought in after being hit by cars, and the other had been disentangled from a barbed wire fence and brought to the centre," Mr Dawson said. "These birds have now recovered to the extent that they can be returned to the wild, and we are confident that they will make this transition smoothly. This species is declining in abundance, and to be able to give these birds a second chance at life and hopefully boost the local breeding population is a really positive thing."

Prior to release the birds were microchipped and DNA samples were taken.

"This will ensure we can identify the birds if we encounter them again, as well as providing us with genetic information about this species of cockatoo so we can learn how to better protect them in the future," Mr Dawson said.

The forest red-tailed black cockatoo is known only to exist in Western Australia, with populations distributed through the Perth Hills, north to Gingin, south-east to Mt Saddleback and south to Rocky Gully. Once common throughout the jarrah forest areas of the State, just 10,000 to 15,000 birds are now estimated to exist in the wild.

Efforts to conserve the cockatoos are being supported by the *Forest Black Cockatoo Recovery Plan*, a joint initiative between DEC, the WA Museum and World Wildlife Fund.'

EPBC REVIEW INTERIM REPORT

From the DEC website:

"The Independent review of the EPBC Act is currently underway and response to the discussion paper has been extensive. In order to identify the broad range of significant issues raised in public submissions, an interim report has been prepared. This report, released by Dr Hawke, outlines the major themes raised in public submissions, the consultation process and the Senate committee inquiry. Dr Hawke is seeking further public comment on the interim report in general and in particular, on a number of specific areas identified in the report. The period for comment closes 5pm AEST Monday 3 August 2009."

Full details on <http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/review/publications/interim-report.html>