

The Australian**BIRD BANDER****Mist Netting In The Northern Territory**

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During the period May to August, 1965, I operated mist nets in the northern part of the Northern Territory, a region relatively new to banders. At no time was a regular banding programme contemplated or undertaken. However, an account of the species met may be of some interest to other banders, especially those who may operate in this area in the future.

(This seems to us a fair example of the use of bird-banding for reconnaissance purposes—it gives subsequent ornithologists an indication of what to expect, and provides an opportunity to handle little known species.—Editor.)

Locality 1. I first set up my nets on the Mountain Creek waterhole near the abandoned homestead of St. Vidgeon, some 32 miles south-east of Roper Bar Police Station (Australian Geographical Series map, 1:1,000,000, SD-53, Roper River; 15° 3' S., 134° 42' E.). Here over a period of five consecutive days I banded the species in Table 1. The majority of birds were netted in the late afternoon at the water's edge.

TABLE 1.

Birds banded at St. Vidgeon, N.T., from 3.5.65 to 7.5.65.

SPECIES	No. banded
Peaceful Dove (<i>Geopelia placida</i>)	2
Restless Flycatcher (<i>Seisura inquieta</i>)	1
Buff-sided Robin (<i>Poecilodryas superciliosa</i>)	1
Rufous Whistler (<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i>)	
—male	2
—female	1
Brown Honeyeater (<i>Gliciphila indistincta</i>)	2
Yellow-tinted Honeyeater (<i>Meliphaga flavescens</i>)	4
Black-ringed Finch (<i>Steganopleura annulosa</i>)	6
Long-tailed Finch (<i>Poephila acuticauda</i>)	6
Masked Finch (<i>Poephila personata</i>)	1
TOTAL BANDED	26

Locality 2. The next locations are all in the Borrooloola district, where Mr. R. K. Carruthers has also operated.

(a) On the McArthur River, a half-mile upstream from the Borrooloola township on 19/5/65 I netted one Masked Finch.

(b) On Tarwallah Station, 30 miles west of Borrooloola, near a waterhole five miles from the homestead, I banded the following species from 25/5/65 to 27/5/65: 2 Long-tailed Finches, 3 Masked Finches, 2 Peaceful Doves and 1 Yellow-tinted Honeyeater.

(c) At the Batten Creek Crossing on the Borrooloola—Bing Bong Station road, some 15 miles from Borrooloola, the following species were banded early in the morning of 29/5/65: 1 Azure Kingfisher (*Alcyon azurea*), 1 Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*).

Locality 3. The third area where I banded was along Pine Creek, which flows into the Gulf of Carpentaria to the north-west of the Sir Edward Pellew Group of islands. (A.G.S. SD-53, Roper River; between 135° 50' E. to 136° 5' E. and 15° 50' S. to 16° 00' S.). This region proved to have some fine sites for banding along a chain of springs and waterholes near the headwaters of the creek. The finch life in particular was prodigious during the time of my visit. The pandanus palms grow in dense clumps around the waterholes and it was in these that the finches nested in great numbers. Honeyeaters too were numerous and fed on the flowering paper barks

which stand in all the swampy areas of the North. Birds were netted here at all times of day.

TABLE 2.

Birds banded at Pine Creek, N.T., from 29.5.65 to 4.6.65.

SPECIES	No. banded
Peaceful Dove (<i>Geopelia placida</i>)	1
Budgerygah (<i>Melopsittacus undulatus</i>)	2
Willie Wagtail (<i>Rhipidura leucophrys</i>)	2
Rufous Whistler (<i>Pachycephala rufiventris</i>)	1
Banded Honeyeater (<i>Myzomela pectoralis</i>)	2
Rufous-throated Honeyeater (<i>Conophila rufogularis</i>)	10
Yellow-tinted Honeyeater (<i>Meliphaga flavescens</i>)	12
White-gaped Honeyeater (<i>Stomiopera unicolor</i>)	3
Black-ringed Finch (<i>Steganopleura annulosa</i>)	10
Crimson Finch (<i>Neochmia phaeton</i>)	13
Long-tailed Finch (<i>Poephila acuticanda</i>)	6
Masked Finch (<i>Poephila personata</i>)	8
Gouldian Finch (<i>Poephila gouldiae</i>)	1
TOTAL BANDED	71

Locality 4. On the shores of a lagoon at the 150 miles peg on the Borroloola-Daly Waters road, late in the afternoon of 5/6/65 I banded: 1 Budgerygah and 3 Black-fronted Dotterels (*Charadrius melanops*).

Locality 5. The fifth and last area where I banded was in the Western Arnhem Land region.

(a) At Mount Brockman, near a series of springs at the foot of the Western Arnhem Land Escarpment (A.G.S. SD-53, Roper River; 132° 72' E., 12° 49' S.) where over a period of a month during August I put up the nets for about seven days in all and banded: 1 Spangled Drongo (*Chibia bracteata*), 1 Forest Kingfisher (*Halcyon macleayii*) and 1 Peaceful Dove.

(b) This locality was one mile south of the Cahill Crossing on the East Alligator River (A.G.S. SD-53, Roper River, 132° 57' E., 12° 26' S.). Here I banded: 1 White-breasted Honeyeater (*Gliciphila fasciata*) on 4/7/65; 1 Peaceful Dove on 21/8/65 and 1 White-gaped Honeyeater on 2/9/65.

During the time I was on the East Alligator I also trapped two little-known species of pigeons the descriptions of which follow. (Both species were also observed in the Mount Brockman area, as under locality 5 (a)).

1. Black-banded Pigeon (*Leucotreron alligator*)

Site: On the East Alligator River, 1 mile south of the Cahill Crossing on the western side of the river.



• Tawny Frogmouth

Photo E. Brandt

Head: White.

Bill: Yellow.

Bill length: 1.68 cm. (taken along the side of the bill from the commencement of the gape).
1.51 cm. (taken along the top to the decurvature).

Iris: Red.

Neck, throat, breast: White.

Upper abdomen: Black band extending around the body.

Lower abdomen: Pale grey.

Lower back: Dark grey mottled black.

Upper tail coverts: Grey fading to white.

Tail: Black with broad white tips.

Under tail: Grey with broad white tips.

Wings: Dark grey with metallic green-blue sheen, thin white line on edge of primaries.

Tibia and tarsus: Both feathered.

Claws and toes: Red.

Length: 12" - 13".

Wing length: 7" (taken after directions in Serventy and Whittell, p. 4)¹.

Wing span: 16" - 17".

Tail length: 5.5" - 6".

Tarsus length: 2.3 cm.

Length of middle toe plus claw: 3.7 cm.

I frequently saw the Black-banded Pigeon resting in trees at the base of and half-way up sandstone cliffs. Once I saw it feeding on the small yellow figs of the bonjon tree² which Cayley quotes as being its main source of food. Cayley also describes its flight as "very noisy" but I did not find it so, compared to the loud clapping noise of the flight of the more commonly seen Squatter Pigeon (*Geophaps scripta*) or the Chestnut-quilled Pigeon (*Petrophassa rufipennis*); I would describe the noise of its flight as a swishing sound.

2. Chestnut-quilled Rock-pigeon (*Petrophassa rufipennis*).

Site: As for previous bird.

Head, nape, breast and upper abdomen: Dark brown feathers with white centres giving a spotted effect.

Lores: Black, lined white on the edges. White line extends from under the eye to beak.

Chin, throat: White.

Back, lower abdomen: Brown feathers edged paler.

Tail, upper and under: Dark Brown.

Wings: Brown, primary coverts and primaries chestnut edged brown.

Tarsus: Dark red.

Feet: Dark-brown-black.

Length: 10.5" - 11.5".

Wing length: 5.5" (taken as per Serventy and Whittell, p. 4).

¹ D. I. Serventy and H. M. Whittell, "A Handbook of the birds of Western Australia", 3rd Edition.

² This is probably the Banyan Tree (*Ficus lacor*), though this is characteristically a tree of the monsoon forest.

Wing span: 13" - 14".

Bill length: 1.7 cm. (taken along the side).

1.2 cm. (taken along top to decurvature).

Tail length: 5" - 6".

Tarsus length: 1.9 cm.

Length of middle toe plus claw: 2.5 cm.

It was rarely that I climbed the sandstone cliffs of the escarpment without hearing the noisy wing beats of this bird. When undisturbed, it squats shyly on and among the rocky massifs and I have never seen it in trees. It appears to move in flocks of two to six at least at the time I observed it, from mid-July to mid-September, and feeds in the sandy patches at the base of rock shelters and on the floor of caves. High on the tops of the rocks and rock plateaus I have found small reservoirs of water in depressions and it is possible that the pigeon obtains its water from this source.

Bird banding in the more remote areas of the Northern Territory is restricted by the climate to the months of the dry season, approximately April to November. Conditions at the end of the dry season are particularly favourable as water resources for the birds are restricted to permanent waterholes and rivers. During December to March, sporadic and unexpected rains, which make roads impassable, would render operations hazardous. Added to this there is the physical discomfort of humid and hot weather at this time.

Finally, I wish to record my grateful acknowledgement to Mr. H. J. de S. Disney for his advice in the preparation of this paper.

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Arrival of the House Sparrow in Mount Isa

The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) has been established in towns in Central Western Queensland such as Longreach and Winton for many years. The species reached Cloncurry sometime after the war probably in the early 1950's. It has now reached Mount Isa.

The first Sparrows were seen in March, 1965, in the grounds of the Christian Brothers' School on the eastern side of town. They quickly established themselves and have nested several times in the school buildings. During 1965, Brother Warner, a teacher at the school, trapped and banded nine Sparrows including several young

birds. By October, 1965, they had spread to the western side of town and were established in one of the residential areas. This area is over a mile distant from the school.

The rate and method of spread of the House Sparrow in country districts could be a most interesting study. Unfortunately, it is a study that appears to be beyond the resources of a small banding group, and progress is unlikely, unless it were to be taken up as an official project by the C.S.I.R.O. or by a State Government Department.

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