

Rat, Black Rat *Rattus rattus*, and Common Planigale *Planigale maculata*, in Grass Owl pellets from the north coast of New South Wales. Studies from coastal Queensland have recorded all the mammals reported herein, plus *Rattus sordidus*, *R. tunneyi*, *Antechinus flavipes*, Sugar Glider *Petaurus breviceps*, birds and insects (Fleay 1968; Dwyer and Wilmer 1975; Hollands 1991). Together with records from inland Australia (Brooker 1976; Parker 1977; Estbergs *et al.* 1978; Schodde and Mason 1980; Beste 1982), these make a total of eight rodent and three marsupial species. Native grassland rodents are of major dietary importance, with birds and insects incidental and insignificant.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to acknowledge Steve Phillips (NSW NPWS) for arranging pellet analysis, and Steve Debus for owl bibliography and assistance.

#### AN OBSERVATION OF COMMUNAL BREEDING BY SOUTHERN WHITEFACES

Communal breeding by the Southern Whiteface *Aphelocephala leucopsis* has not been recorded previously. Dow (1980) listed 39 species thus far reported as communal breeders, but the Southern Whiteface was not among them. However, because Whitefaces are always found in groups, it has been widely suspected that they may breed communally.

During a wet and unproductive banding weekend near Violet Town, Victoria on 12 September 1993, a group of us found a Southern Whiteface nest and our curiosity was aroused to find out if these particular birds were breeding communally.

Previously, we had colour-banded several Southern Whitefaces in a small grassy area of about 3 ha, bordered by Golden Wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*) and Green Mallee (*Eucalyptus viridis*). We followed the activities of several birds frequenting a clump of dead wood lying in the open and found a bird in a hollow branch, sitting approximately 40 cm back from the entrance. We then set up a telescope about 50 m from the clump.

From 12.00 noon to 12.45 p.m., we observed the following four birds visit the nest:

- Bird 1 = Yellow/red, a 1st year female
- Bird 2 = Yellow/green, an aged 2+ male
- Bird 3 = White/light blue, an aged 2+ male
- Bird 4 = Unbanded

The following visits were observed:

- Bird 1 — Four visits
- Bird 2 — One visit
- Bird 3 — Three visits
- Bird 4 — One visit

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On each visit, food could be seen protruding from the bill. Heavy rain prevented us from making further observations.

Although further observations are needed to find how general the pattern is, Southern Whitefaces appear to fit the pattern reported by Ford *et al.* (1988) who found that many communal breeders are in woodlands and feed on the ground.

Interestingly, this observation fits the pattern showing that many of the declining woodland birds in south-eastern Australia are communal breeders. It has previously been reported that Whitefaces are declining in parts of their range (Robinson 1993). Now we know that they breed communally.

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Received 24 May 1994