

IV BIRDS OF DONGOLOCKING NATURE RESERVE

JOHN DELL

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the biological survey of the Western Australian wheatbelt, little was known about detailed distributions, habitat preferences and population densities of wheatbelt birds. Already information has been published on birds of the southeastern part of the wheatbelt (Dell 1976, 1977, and Dell & Johnstone 1976). However, the southwestern part of the wheatbelt is still poorly known.

This paper presents data on the southwestern wheatbelt by listing birds of the Dongolocking Nature Reserve *ca* 50 km east of Narrogin (for location and reserve details see Chapman, this report). The information was obtained by me during 15-25 October 1974 and 7-17 April 1975. Vegetation locations mentioned are from Muir (this report).

ANNOTATED LIST

White-faced Heron (*Ardea novaehollandiae*)

Uncommon. One at farm dam in October.

Mountain Duck (*Tadorna tadornoides*)

Uncommon. Pair at farm dam adjacent to loc. 1.58 in April and October.

Wood Duck (*Chenonetta jubata*)

Seasonal, moderately common. Flocks of up to 23 birds on farm dams in October.

Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus notatus*)

Uncommon. One over loc. 4.12 in April.

Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*)

Uncommon. One over paddock and 1 in woodland on block X in October.

Brown Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus*)

Uncommon. One in loc. 1.18 and 1 in woodland on block X in October.

Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*)

Uncommon. Pair over loc. 4.12 and 1 over loc. 4.24 in October. One in

loc. 1.18 and pair over paddock adjacent to loc. 1.33 in April. Old nest in *Eucalyptus longicornis* tree in block X14.

Little Eagle (*Aquila morphnoides*)

Uncommon. One calling over woodland on block X in October.

Little Falcon (*Falco longipennis*)

Uncommon. One in loc. 1.33 in April.

Brown Falcon (*Falco berigora*)

Uncommon; woodland, shrubland and heath. Single birds in loc. 1.54, 1.33 and 4.11 and 3 in loc. 4.16 in October. One in loc. 3.1, 4.24 and 1.33 in April.

Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*)

Uncommon. One seen twice over loc. 4.16 and 1 over wheatfield in October.

Painted Quail (*Turnix varia*)

Uncommon; woodland, mallee and heath. One in loc. 4.4 and 2 in loc. 1.33 in October. Two adults and 2 young in loc. 2.8 on 25 October. A male with large testes was collected on 23 October.

Common Bronzewing (*Phaps chalcoptera*)

Uncommon; woodland, mallee, heath and paddocks. Two pairs in paddocks in October. Pair in paddock, pair in loc. 1.33, pair in loc. 2.1 and 1 in loc. 4.16 in April.

Purple-crowned Lorikeet (*Glossopsitta porphyrocephala*)

Uncommon. One flew from hollow in Wandoo (*Eucalyptus wandoo*) tree at loc. 1.33 on 19 October.

Ringnecked Parrot (*Platycercus zonarius*)

Common. Edges of Reserve and woodlands; mainly feeding in paddocks. In a 20 km drive between the Reserve and Dumbleyung 38 were counted along the road. Preferred habitat in the Reserve is Wandoo woodland, e.g. loc. 1.33. A total of 135 birds were counted in the Reserve in October and 121 in April.

Western Rosella (*Platycercus icterotis*)

Moderately common; woodland and edges of paddocks. Two in loc. 1.31,

3 in loc. 1.29, and 2 in loc. 1.54 in October. Three in loc. 1.2, 4 in loc. 1.28, 6 in loc. 1.29 and 2 in nearby paddock in April. Some birds in April were feeding on *E. wandoo* seeds.

Elegant Parrot (*Neophema elegans*)

Uncommon; woodland and edges of paddocks. One in loc. 1.54, and 3 in loc. 1.33 in October. Three on edge of paddock adjacent to loc. 4.17 in April.

White-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudinii*)

Uncommon. Three feeding in paddock 50 m from loc. 1.34 in October. Later they were feeding in loc. 4.24 and on Wandoo seeds in loc. 1.31.

Galah (*Cacatua roseicapilla*)

Uncommon. Pair in loc. 1.33 and pair over shrubland near loc. 1.3 in October. Thirteen at Dumblebung 20 km from Reserve in October.

Pallid Cuckoo (*Cuculus pallidus*)

Uncommon; woodland and heath. Three calling in loc. 1.33, 1 in loc. 1.54 and 1 calling in loc. 4.24 in October.

Fan-tailed Cuckoo (*Cuculus flabelliformis*)

Uncommon; woodland. Three in loc. 1.33, and single birds in loc. 1.57, 1.54 and block X22 in October. One in loc. 1.14 in April.

Horsfield Bronze Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx basalus*)

Uncommon, seasonal; woodland and heath. Two in loc. 1.33, 1 in block X22, 2 in loc. 4.24, and 1 in loc. 4.4 in October.

Shining Bronze Cuckoo (*Chrysococcyx lucidus*)

Uncommon; woodland. One in block X in October.

Boobook Owl (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*)

Uncommon; woodland. Two calling in loc. 1.33 and 1 in loc. 1.28 in October.

Tawny Frogmouth (*Podargus strigoides*)

Probably moderately common. Several seen on edges of Reserve while spotlighting in October. One flushed from ground in loc. 1.33 during daytime in April.

Crested Owlet-nightjar (*Aegotheles cristatus*)

Uncommon; woodland. One calling in loc. 1.33 in April.

Laughing Kookaburra (*Dacelo gigas*)

Uncommon; woodland. Pair in loc. 1.54 in October, 1 in loc. 1.33 in April.

Sacred Kingfisher (*Halcyon sancta*)

Seasonal, moderately common; woodland. Pairs calling loudly in Wandoo woodland loc. 1.33, 1.54 and block X22 in October.

Black-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*)

Seasonal, moderately common. Flocks of up to 8 birds in woodland loc. 1.54, 1.18, 1.33 and block X22 and several over heath loc. 4.24 in October. Pair excavating burrow in loc. 1.33 on 23 October.

Tree Martin (*Hirundo nigricans*)

Moderately common. Flocks of up to 30 birds in woodland in loc. 1.33, 1.54 and block X22 in October. Some were flying into hollow branches and were probably nesting. Flocks of up to 40 birds in loc. 1.33, over loc. 3.1, 4.24, and paddocks in April. Most of these flocks seemed to be in transit. A flock of *ca* 200 was gathering to roost in woodland on 14 April.

Richard's Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)

Moderately common in paddocks. Occasionally birds fly over Reserve.

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina novaehollandiae*)

Moderately common; woodland. Pair present in loc. 1.33 during October survey, pair in block X22 and 7 flying southeast over heath on 17 October. Pairs in loc. 1.54, 1.33 and block X22 and 3 in loc. 1.25 in April.

White-winged Triller (*Lalage sueurii*)

Uncommon. Four sightings in October: 1 in loc. 1.54 and 1 in loc. 4.16; a group of 3 and group of 5 over paddocks were in transit on 21 and 23 October respectively.

Brown Flycatcher (*Microeca leucophaea*)

Uncommon; woodland and mallee. Pair in loc. 2.3; pair with nest, 2 eggs, on fallen limb 0.7 m from ground in loc. 1.57 on 20 October; pair building nest on dead branch 6 m from ground in *E. wandoo* tree on block X22 on 24 October. One in block X22 in April.

Red-capped Robin (*Petroica goodenovii*)

Uncommon; woodland. Male in loc. 1.14 and pair in block X22 in October. Male in loc. 1.18 and 2 females in loc. 1.28 in April.

Scarlet Robin (*Petroica multicolor*)

Uncommon; woodland. Pair in loc. 1.52 and male feeding female in block X22 in October. Pair in loc. 1.14 and loc. 1.16, and 2 pairs in block X22 in April.

Hooded Robin (*Petroica cucullata*)

Uncommon. Pair in ecotone between woodland loc. 1.33 and heath loc. 4.23 in October.

Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria australis*)

Uncommon; woodland. Two pairs in loc. 1.57 and pair in block X22 in October.

Golden Whistler (*Pachycephala pectoralis*)

Moderately common. In shrublands loc. 3.1, 5.1; woodland loc. 1.18; mallee loc. 2.8; woodland with understoreys loc. 1.28, 1.31 and 1.43; and mallee with understorey loc. 2.7.

Rufous Whistler (*Pachycephala rufiventris*)

Uncommon; woodland. Pair in block X22 in October. Single birds in loc. 1.33, 1.54 and in Wandoo trees in paddock in April.

Grey Shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla harmonica*)

Moderately common. Mainly in pairs in woodland including loc. 1.33, 1.54, 1.25, 1.16 and block X22 in October and April.

Shrike-tit (*Falcunculus frontatus*)

Uncommon; woodland. One in loc. 1.57 in October. One in loc. 1.33 and loc. 1.2 in April.

Crested Bellbird (*Oreoica gutturalis*)

Uncommon. Two calling in loc. 1.54 in October, 1 calling on edge of loc. 1.54 in April.

Grey Fantail (*Rhipidura fuliginosa*)

Seasonal; woodland and mallee. One in loc. 1.14 in October. Mostly singly but groups of up to 3 birds in most woodland and mallee associations in April. Seemed to increase in numbers after 12 April.

Willie Wagtail (*Rhipidura leucophrys*)

Uncommon; woodland, mallee and road verges. One in loc. 1.54, 1 in loc. 2.8 and 4 single birds in road verges between paddocks in October. Two in loc. 1.25, 1 in block X22 and 1 in paddock in April.

Restless Flycatcher (*Myiagra inquieta*)

Uncommon; woodland. Two pairs in loc. 1.54, 1 pair in loc. 1.33 and block X14 in October. Pair in loc. 1.33 and block X22 in April.

Magpie-lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*)

Uncommon; woodland and farmland. One at dam near Reserve in October. Pair in loc. 1.33, pair in loc. 1.30 and 1 in loc. 1.54 in April. During a 38 km drive from this Reserve to Tarin Rock Reserve in October 11 birds were counted.

Southern Scrub-robin (*Drymodes brunneopygius*)

Uncommon; mallee, shrubland and heath. Several in loc. 2.8, 3.1, 3.4, and 4.16 in October and April.

White-browed Babbler (*Pomatostomus superciliosus*)

Uncommon; only seen in October. Three groups of up to 6 birds in woodland with *Acacia acuminata*, *Casuarina huegeliana* and *Dryandra sessilis* in understory at loc. 1.54, 1.30 and block X22. The following old nests were recorded in woodland on block X: 4 in *Acacia acuminata*, 3 in *Hakea ?prostrata*, 1 in *Dryandra sessilis*, 1 in a sapling *E. wandoo* and 1 in *Casuarina huegeliana*.

Western Warbler (*Gerygone fusca*)

Uncommon; woodland. Singly or groups of up to 3 birds, total of 8 seen in October and 4 in April. In loc. 1.14, 1.28, block X22 and *E. wandoo* trees in paddock.

Weebill (*Smicromnis brevirostris*)

Moderately common throughout Reserve in eucalypts. Recorded feeding in *E. wandoo*, *E. astringens*, *E. falcata*, *E. gardneri* and *E. redunca*. Adults feeding young in nest 14 m from ground in *E. wandoo* in block X22 on 22 October.

Broad-tailed Thornbill (*Acanthiza apicalis*)

Moderately common; heath, shrubland, mallee and woodland with understories. In loc. 1.22, 1.54, 2.8, 3.4, 4.24 and block X22 in October. In loc.

1.25, 1.28 and 4.16 in April. Two nests each with 2 eggs in regrowth block U3 on 23 October. Pair feeding a bronze cuckoo at loc. 2.8 on 23 October.

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill (*Acanthiza uropygialis*)

Uncommon; woodland. Pair feeding 3 flying young in loc. 1.18 on 17 October. Two groups of about 5 birds in same area in April.

Yellow-rumped Thornbill (*Acanthiza chrysorrhoa*)

Uncommon; woodland. Flocks of up to 4 birds in loc. 1.14, 1.18, 1.25, 1.28, 1.54 and block X22 and in paddocks with Wandoo trees and saplings in October and April. Apparently only present on the Reserve in woodlands with understories of *Casuarina huegeliana*, *Acacia acuminata* or saplings of the upper stratum trees.

Western Thornbill (*Acanthiza inornata*)

Uncommon. Groups of up to 5 birds in woodland with understories near loc. 1.31 and 1.53 in April and October.

White-browed Scrub-wren (*Sericornis frontalis*)

Moderately common; shrubland, heath more than 1 m tall, and mallee over heath or mosaics of the above. Recorded in loc. 2.8, 3.4, 4.17 and ecotone between loc. 1.37 and 2.7 in October and in locs 2.4, 3.1, 4.16, 4.21 and heath block X20 in April.

Field Wren (*Calamanthus fuliginosus*)

Moderately common. In heath less than 1 m tall at loc. 4.4, 4.24 and regrowth on block B in October and April.

Blue-breasted Wren (*Malurus pulcherrimus*)

Uncommon. Group of 4 including male in nuptial plumage in shrubland loc. 3.1 in October, group of 4 in mallee over shrubland loc. 2.1 in April.

Southern Emu-wren (*Stipiturus malachurus*)

Uncommon. Two in heath less than 0.5 m tall at loc. 4.24 in October.

Rufous Songlark (*Cincloramphus mathewsi*)

Uncommon. Several calling and displaying in woodland with little or no understory at loc. 1.33 and 1.54 in October.

Brown Songlark (*Cincloramphus cruralis*)

Uncommon. One on telephone pole in paddock in October.

Australian Sittella (*Neositta chrysoptera*)

Uncommon; woodland. Three in loc. 1.33 and 4 in block X22 in October. Seven in block X22 and 5 in loc. 1.25 feeding in *Acacia acuminata* trees in April.

Rufous Tree-creeper (*Climacteris rufa*)

Moderately common; Wandoo woodland. Several in loc. 1.33, about 8 in loc. 1.54/1.57, about 5 in block X22 in October; about 8 in loc. 1.33, 4 in loc. 1.54, 2 in block X22 and 3 in mallet woodland loc. 1.16 in April.

Spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus punctatus*)

Seasonal, moderately common. Flocks of up to 6 birds present in most Wandoo woodlands visited in April. Recorded in loc. 1.33, 1.54, 1.29, 1.25 and block X22.

Striated Pardalote (*Pardalotus striatus*)

Common. Throughout most Wandoo and mallet associations in October: recorded in loc. 1.33, 1.37, 1.18, 1.16, 1.53 and block X22. These birds were calling prominently and seemed to be temporarily resident during October. On 16 October many others were in transit; flocks of up to 8 birds were flying south and giving migratory calls. Flocks of up to 8 birds feeding in Wandoo trees in loc. 1.14, 1.25, 1.29, 1.33, 1.54 and block X22 in April. On 8 April many were in transit; flocks of up to 15 birds were flying north and northeast and giving migratory calls.

Grey-breasted Silverege (*Zosterops lateralis*)

Uncommon; woodland, shrubland and heath. Three in ecotone between loc. 1.37 and 2.7, 2 in loc. 4.17, 6 in loc. 4.24, 3 in loc. 1.53, 2 in shrubland similar to loc. 2.7 and 2 in regrowth area U3 in October. A flock of 17 flying over loc. 4.24 on 16 October was in transit. Two in loc. 4.4, 4 in loc. 4.16 and about 10 in loc. 1.25 in April.

Brown Honeyeater (*Lichmera indistincta*)

Common. Plentiful in shrublands and heaths especially those with flowering *Lambertia inermis* but scarce in woodlands and mallee in October. Recorded in loc. 1.37, 1.53, 2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.4, 4.15, 4.17, 4.24, and 4.29. Nest with 2 tiny young in *Banksia sphaerocarpa* 0.4 m from ground near loc. 4.29 on 23 October. Less common but more widespread in April; mainly in pairs and groups of up to 4 birds. Recorded in loc. 1.29, 1.31, 1.33, 1.54, 1.75, 3.1, 4.17, 5.16, and in Wandoo trees in paddocks. Feeding in flowering *Dryandra sessilis* in loc. 1.54 in April.

Singing Honeyeater (*Meliphaga virescens*)

Uncommon; woodland, shrubland and heath. Two single birds feeding among flowering *Lambertia inermis* near loc. 3.4 in October. Three in loc. 1.25, 1.28 and block X22 and 1 in loc. 4.16 in April.

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater (*Meliphaga ornata*)

Common; Wandoo woodland, visits shrublands during prolific flowering. Recorded in loc. 1.33, 1.54, 1.57 and block X22 in October and in 1.25, 1.33, 1.54, and block X22 in April. Flocks visiting flowering *Lambertia inermis* in loc. 3.1 and 3.4 in October. Some giving aerial displays in October.

White-eared Honeyeater (*Meliphaga leucotis*)

Uncommon. Apparently occupied different associations in autumn and spring. Pair in mallet woodland (*E. gardneri* and *E. falcata*) loc. 1.37 and pair in *E. falcata* mallet on edge of block X22 in October. One in woodland loc. 1.17 and 1.31, 2 in woodland loc. 1.25 and 2 pairs in mallee loc. 2.4 in April. One recorded by Muir (pers. comm.) in *E. gardneri* mallet loc. 1.26 in August.

Purple-gaped Honeyeater (*Meliphaga cratitia*)

Uncommon. A few in mallee over heath loc. 2.8 in October. One pair was feeding a young bird which was barely flying on 22 October.

Brown-headed Honeyeater (*Melithreptus brevirostris*)

Uncommon; woodland and mallee. One in loc. 2.7, 2 in loc. 1.37 and several in block X22 and 6 feeding in flowering regrowth mallee on block U3 in October.

White-cheeked Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris nigra*)

Uncommon. Flocks of up to 8 birds in *Lambertia inermis* shrublands loc. 3.1 and 3.4 in October and April.

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris melanops*)

Common throughout all heaths in October and April. Moderately common in flowering *Lambertia inermis* shrubland at loc. 3.1 and 3.4 in October, less common there in April. Nest with 2 eggs in *Dryandra cirsioides* 0.6 m from ground at loc. 3.4 on 16 October.

Western Spinebill (*Acanthorhynchus superciliosus*)

Uncommon. Pair in ecotone between woodland block X22 and heath X20 in October and April.

Red Wattle-bird (*Anthochaera carunculata*)

Uncommon; woodland, mallee, shrubland and heath. Ten pairs throughout Reserve in loc. 1.34, 1.52, 1.58, 3.1, 4.16 and 4.24 in October. Singly or in groups of up to 4 birds in loc. 1.5, 1.17, 1.20, 1.25, 1.29, 1.31 and 2.3 in April. In October some were feeding among flowering *Lambertia inermis*. Pair feeding 2 recently flying young on 20 October.

White-fronted Chat (*Epthianura albifrons*)

Uncommon. Flock of 9 feeding in paddock adjacent to heath loc. 4.16, 4.17 in October and 30 there in April. Five in paddock west of Reserve in April.

Black-faced Wood-swallow (*Artamus cinereus*)

Uncommon; heath and farmland. Only recorded in October. Three in loc. 4.16 and flocks of 3, 2, 5, 2, 2, and 3 in paddocks adjoining Reserve.

Dusky Wood-swallow (*Artamus cyanopterus*)

Uncommon; woodland. One in loc. 1.54 in October, 7 in loc. 1.33 in April.

Grey Butcher-bird (*Cracticus torquatus*)

Uncommon; Wandoo woodland. Single birds in loc. 1.5, 1.33, 1.52 and block X22 in October and loc. 1.29, 1.31 and 1.33 in April.

Magpie (*Cracticus tibicen*)

Moderately common in farmland. Some groups roost in Wandoo woodland on Reserve, most roost in trees in paddocks. Groups were fairly small, averaging 3 birds. Young only recently flying in paddocks on 21 October.

Grey Currawong (*Strepera versicolor*)

Uncommon; woodland, mallee and shrubland. Pair in loc. 1.33, pair in block L and single birds in loc. 1.58, block X22 and loc. 2.4 in October. Single birds or groups of up to 3 in loc. 1.14, 1.16, 1.22, 1.33, block X22, and loc. 3.1 in April.

Australian Raven (*Corvus coronoides*)

Common. Throughout woodlands and farm country; others flying over heaths and shrublands. Mostly in pairs or groups of up to 5 birds. A flock of ca 50 birds in a farm paddock in October may have been Little Crows (*Corvus bennetti*).

The Australian Raven at Dongolocking is about 30% more common than Magpie, based on counts made during the breeding season in October.

DISCUSSION

The survey of Dongolocking Nature Reserve revealed 82 species of birds on the Reserve and adjacent areas. Five of these were recorded only in farmland and another 4 only in an area of Wandoo woodland (block X, Muir this report) south of the Reserve. This total is close to the 87 species at Tarin Rock and surrounds (Dell & Johnstone 1976) and 85 at Bendering and surrounds (Dell 1977) and 98 at Lake Magenta and surrounds (Dell 1976). However, the area included in the Lake Magenta list is considerably larger than that used in the other reports listed above.

Thirteen birds found at Dongolocking were not found at Tarin Rock (ca 55 km east of Dongolocking) and 15 birds found at Dongolocking were not found at Bendering Reserves (ca 95 km northeast of Dongolocking). Tarin Rock and Bendering Reserves each had 18 species not found at Dongolocking.

Dell (1977) has already outlined differences between the birds of Tarin Rock and Bendering Reserves. I commented that most species found only at one area were not resident in that part of the wheatbelt or were migrants or species so infrequently recorded as to preclude any assessment of their status. These factors explain most of the differences between the assemblages of Dongolocking and Bendering and Tarin Rock Reserves.

However, the presence of some woodland species at Dongolocking is interesting. The Laughing Kookaburra is widespread but patchy in the southern wheatbelt and is found as far east as Lake Magenta (Dell 1976). The lack of large areas of woodland trees suitable for nesting hollows throughout much of the wheatbelt including the Bendering and Tarin Rock areas probably explains its absence there. The Scarlet Robin may have been more common in the wheatbelt than its present patchy distribution indicates. It is likely to survive in the long term only in large areas of Wandoo (*Eucalyptus wandoo*) woodland such as at Dongolocking. Similar comments can be made regarding the Rufous Tree-creeper (it is moderately common in Wandoo woodland at Dongolocking but absent from the Bendering or Tarin Rock areas); and Western Shrike-tit (thought to be widespread in woodland in the South West but infrequently recorded). The apparent absence of Rufous Tree-creeper from other Wandoo woodlands such as loc. 1.14, 1.18, 1.25, 1.28, 1.29, 1.31, is unexplained. Perhaps it is related

to the surface area of the trunks and fallen logs. The locations where this species was present tended to have more trees and fallen logs per unit area than locations where it was absent. The scarcity of White-eared Honeyeater here may be due to the large population of *M. ornata* which occupies woodland thought to be suitable for *M. leucotis*. The two species were only recorded together in one association, loc. 1.25.

Another two species, Western Spinebill and Western Thornbill, were also found at Dongolocking but not at Bendering or Tarin Rock. Both these species were found in shrubs below Wandoo trees.

It is thought that, with the exception of a few woodland species, the bird assemblage at Dongolocking is typical of the southern wheatbelt. A few species such as Laughing Kookaburra, Scarlet Robin, Rufous Tree-creeper, Western Thornbill, Western Shrike-tit and Western Spinebill are more characteristic of the southwestern forested area. Their presence at Dongolocking is not unexpected considering the large amount of Wandoo woodland still present there.

The woodland birds mentioned above were probably widespread in the belt of mixed woodland which previously was continuous along the western edge of the wheatbelt, especially from about York southwards. With clearing of much of this woodland some birds have disappeared or are restricted to a few areas such as Dongolocking.

Most of the birds at Dongolocking are probably resident although only 14 were recorded breeding during the October survey. Most of those breeding were small passerines; it is likely that nesting by non-passerines was largely undetected. Possibly the October survey was before the peak breeding season as some species have been recorded nest-building in November elsewhere in the wheatbelt.