

BIRD CARE AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC SA



MAGAZINE



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120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide SA 5000

ABN 353 538 655 41

Vol. 24 No. 175 ISSN 0818-8890November 2004



Boxes of Trouble - Spring 2004

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Bulletin Board

Christmas Party.....

The Christmas season is almost here again and the BCCS last get together for the year will be on Sunday December 5th at Wendy Bagot's at 61 McArthur Avenue, Plympton from 11am.

BBQ available, BYO food and drink, coffee and tea supplied.

Come along for an enjoyable time with like minded bird carers.



Wombaroo

Wombaroo is still available at cost for non-releasable birds and no cost for releasable birds, contact Roy ph 8379 1258.

Baby Cereal

Anyone wanting baby cereal please phone Pam 8390 3254. The cereal order for 2005 will be made soon so think ahead about what you might need for the next year.

Digital BCCS Magazine by Email

To receive the BCCS Magazine as coloured pdf file instead of b&w hardcopy, email bccs@birdcare.asn.au

BCCS New Committee

At the last BCCS General Meeting held at the Arkaba on July 18th 2004, the following changes were made to the BCCS committee:-

- Wendy Bagot resigned as committee member
- Liz Surridge was voted in as President
- Wendy Bagot was voted in as Vice President and
- Anne Whicker was voted in as Committee Member

Also, Bob Hall accepted the position of Public Officer.

As BCCS has now changed its operations to an advice service instead of accepting all rescued birds, the BCCS Committee only needs to meet at the Conservation Centre, every two months.

If you have a matter to be brought to the committee please contact the Secretary Bob Hall

Vale Duncan Williams

Duncan was a regular attendee at our Bird Care monthly meetings and members who knew him were saddened to learn of his tragic death in a car accident on Sunday 9 May (Mothers Day).

Duncan was returning home after taking his ill wife to hospital at Elizabeth when his car was struck from behind whilst stationary at traffic lights at 5.30 a.m. He died at the scene of the accident. Duncan was 79. He was born in Yorkshire, England and came to Australia in the mid 1960's. Duncan joined Bird Care in 1995 and was a carer of many hundreds of birds during his time with us. His bright and cheerful manner was a hallmark of his character.

Bob Hall and Barrie and Lesley Hodgson attended his funeral. It was his family's wish that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to Bird Care. \$400 was received and gratefully acknowledged.

Condolences to Duncan's family were expressed at this tragic time.

Ducks 'quack in regional accents'

It may sound like a load of quackers but according to new research ducks have regional accents.

"Cockney" ducks from London make a rougher sound, not unlike their human counterparts, so their fellow quackers can hear them above the city's hubbub.

But their Cornish cousins communicate with a softer, more relaxed sound, the team from Middlesex University found.

Ducks, like humans, are influenced by their environment, said Dr Victoria De Rijke, who has been nicknamed Dr Quack. Her research team discovered the difference after recording the quacks of ducks at two separate locations.

The birds at Spitalfields City Farm in the heart of the cockney east London, were found to be "much louder and vocally excitable" than the ducks recorded on Trierieve Farm in Donderry, Cornwall, said English language lecturer Dr De Rijke.

"The Cornish ducks made longer and more relaxed sounds, much more chilled out.



"The cockney (London) quack is like a shout and a laugh, whereas the Cornish ducks sound more like they are giggling," she added.

"London ducks have the stress of city life and a lot of noise to compete with, like sirens, horns, planes and trains. The Cornish ducks' open and quiet surroundings made all the difference to the way they quacked", she said.

"So it is like humans; cockneys have short open vowels whereas the Cornish have longer vowels and speak fairly slowly," Dr De Rijke concluded.

The study was designed to look at how language developed and Dr De Rijke now

hopes to study the quacking sounds of Irish, Geordie and scouse ducks.

Dr De Rijke said she chose ducks because they were sociable and had a good sense of humour like humans.

ref: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3775799.stm
June 2004

Intelligent Crows

An article about the intelligence of ravens under the heading "Craven Raven puts mind theory to test. Biologists have evidence that birds can have thoughts" appeared in The Australian in June. This just goes to show that that our feathered friends are just as intelligent as we have always said they were!

Humans like to regard themselves as exceptional. Other animals do not have complex syntactical languages. Nor do most of them appear to enjoy that same level of consciousness that people do. And many philosophers believe humans are the only species to understand that others have their own thoughts. That understanding is known in the trade as having a theory of mind and it is considered the gateway to cherished human qualities such as empathy and deception.

Biologists have learned to treat such assumptions with caution. In particular, they have found evidence of theories of mind in a range of mammals, from gorillas to goats. But two recent studies suggest that even mammalian studies may be looking at the question too narrowly. Birds, it seems, can have theories of mind, too.

In The Proceedings of the Royal Society, Bernd Heinrich and Thomas Bugnyar of the University of Vermont in Burlington in the US describe a series of experiments they have carried out on ravens. They wanted to see how these birds, which are known to be (at least by avian standards) clever and sociable, would respond to human gaze.

Response to gaze is reckoned to be a good measure of the development of theory of mind in human children. By about 18 months, most children are able to follow the gaze of another person and infer things

about the gazer from it. Failure to develop this trick is an early symptom of autism, a syndrome whose main underlying feature is an inability to understand that other people have minds, too.

To test whether ravens could follow gaze, Heinrich and Bugnyar used six six-month old hand-reared ravens and one four-year-old. The birds were sat, one at a time, on a perch on one side of the room divided by a barrier. An experimenter sat about 1m in front of the barrier. The experimenter moved his head and eyes in a particular direction and gazed for 30 seconds before looking away. Sometimes he gazed up, sometimes to the part of the room where the bird sat and sometimes to the part of the room hidden behind the barrier. The experiment was taped.

Heinrich and Bugnyar found that all the birds were able to follow the gaze of the experimenters, even beyond the barrier. The curious birds jumped down from the perch and walked around the barrier to have a look or leaped on top of it and peered over. There was never anything there, but they were determined to see for themselves. A suggested result but not, perhaps, a conclusive one. However, the second study, carried out by Bugnyar when he was working in the University of Austria and published in April in *Animal Cognition*, suggests that ravens may have mastered the art of deception, too.

In his case, the observation was serendipitous. Bugnyar was conducting an experiment to see what ravens learn from each other while foraging. While doing so, he noticed strange interactions between two males, Hugin, a subordinate bird, and Munin a dominant one.

The task was to work out which colour-coded film containers held some bits of cheese, then prise the containers open and eat the contents. The subordinate male was far better at this task than the dominant one. However, he never managed to gulp down more than a few pieces of the reward before the dominant raven, Munin, was hustling him on his way. Clearly (and not unexpectedly) ravens are able to learn about food sources from one another. They

are also able to bully each other to gain access to that food.

But then something unexpected happened. Hugin, the subordinate, tried a new strategy. As soon as Munin bullied him, he headed over to a set of empty containers, prised the lids of them enthusiastically and pretended to eat. Munin followed, where upon Hugin returned to the loaded containers and ate his fill.

At first Bugnyar could not believe what he was seeing. He was anxious about sharing his observation, for fear that no one would believe him. But Hugin, he is convinced, was clearly misleading Munin. As it happened, Munin was no dummy either. He soon grew wise to the tactic and would not be led astray. "He got very angry and started throwing things around," Bugnyar says.

Perhaps ravens have something else in common with people – a hatred of being found out.

The Australian, Wednesday June 16 2004

Have you ever wondered why? Sleeping birds don't fall off their perches?

No, its not because they are really awake, and can concentrate on remaining upright! Rather, a sleeping bird stays upright thanks to the flexor tendons that run down the back of each leg and under both feet.

When a bird lands on a perch, its legs bend and cause the flexor tendons to automatically tighten and flex the toes, clamping its claws firmly around the perch. The weight of the bird helps lock the knobby sections of the tendons into the ridged sheath that surrounds part of each of them, preventing the tendons from sliding.

When the bird wakes and straightens its legs, the tendons relax and the grip is released, allowing the bird to leave its perch.

Source: University of Sydney's Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, as cited in Reader's Digest Magazine.

Black Falcon Rescue and Rehabilitation

It was a female Black Falcon weighing close to 1kg. The average weight of a female Black Falcon is 900g. This species (more so the female) is very ferocious, difficult to handle, perhaps even obnoxious is a good word. That 1kg is mostly solid muscle - making my job difficult, to say the least. She ate on her own - it is virtually impossible to force feed one of these anyway - unless they're feeling really sick. (Then again, if I can strap her wing single handedly, I guess I could feed her?)

Once she was rehydrated - she was ready to fight me all the way. However saying all that, they are a most majestic species - fast bird hunters not unlike the Peregrine Falcon.



Details of the rescue and rehabilitation:- The Black Falcon was found at the Salisbury Cemetery on 6th February 2004. It was in the sun on a 35 degree day, covered in ants, and quite lifeless. The Cemetery keeper was going to put a spade through it's neck (humane euthanasia might be a better way to put it). All of a sudden it turned to him and gave a sign of hope, so he put it in a cardboard box and eventually got onto me.

After examination, I found it was suffering from severe dehydration and heatstroke, minor fracture of the metacarpal bones in the left wing (wing tip), trichomoniasis (protozoan infection of the mouth/throat), stomach worms (I found out later in the droppings) and bird lice.

I hurried the falcon to the vet where I used to work as a vet nurse, as I knew it would die if fluids were not administered immediately. We spent at least 30 minutes

rehydrating it intravenously - not easy with small bird veins.

Once home, it lay in the box for 9 hours on it's stomach, breathing laboured, eyes closed - I was sure it would die until suddenly it scared the daylights out of me, when it jumped out of the box and began to scream very loudly.

I was so grateful to my vet, Dr Tony Atyeo. I have no doubt that his skill in IV rehydration saved that bird. It was also done quickly, and without fuss. The bird would have died on the table had we taken too long to do the procedure.

We then treated the other 'less urgent' problems:

- medication for the internal and external parasites
- medication for the throat infection - one single Spartrix trichomoniasis tablet, then daily antibiotic injections for 5 days following, to clear the secondary infection.
- strapping and confinement for the wing fracture -mall cages and aviaries must be lined with hessian or shadecloth to prevent feather damage in all birds of prey
- finally it was flighted to assess and improve wing movement - the fracture was very minor so this presented us with no problems.

Once in the flight aviary the bird actually became spooked quite easily. This predisposes it to feather damage from hitting the sides of the aviary. Birds that upset easily and bash about in an aviary will damage feathers, even in the best shadecloth/slatted/hessian lined aviary. Once feathers are broken, it may take up to 12mths to moult and grow new feathers. We therefore released her a little sooner than perhaps we normally would after a fracture, to avoid the feather damage occurring. She was released back at the Salisbury Cemetery and flew extremely well, gaining height early in flight which indicates good wing strength.

She was quite an old bird, so there is always the thought that perhaps she was at the end of her road. However, all her problems were treatable. We can only give them a second chance. She has an

Australasian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme band on her leg.

While in captivity she ate rabbit, sparrows, feral pigeons, birds, mice, rats and occasionally a day old chick. None is fed as live food - unnecessary.

Anita Turton

Minton Farm - Update

Minton Farm eventually succeeded with their court case and have approval for their Sanctuary land use, with the use of volunteers, as was approved by Council. They are scheduled to attend Court on Wednesday 8th November for the memorandum of conditions of approval to be handed down to an open court from the full bench.

All BCCS members, families and friends are invited to Minton Farm's Appreciation Party on Saturday 27th November 2004, to thank community members for their support through the long ordeal.

The party is at the Cherry Gardens Oval clubrooms. BYO basket supper and there will be the Phoenix Jazz Band, BBQ and clubroom bar facilities.

The party starts at 8pm. For enquiries phone 8270 1169.

The Relocation and Introduction of a Juvenile Australian Magpie to a New Social Group

I collected a juvenile Australian Magpie from my local vet in Willaston, it was September, the bird was a new flyer, and as per usual there was nothing wrong with it. Unfortunately the veterinary nurse hadn't taken any details, all we knew was that the bird came from Salisbury Heights.

After giving the vet nurse a swift 'slap on the wrist', I drove home quite annoyed that this bird has been unintentionally kidnapped from its family. It should have been placed high up on a nearby tree branch, to continue the process of learning to fly under the watchful eye of its family.

I began to feed it at home, however it wasn't accepting me as the parent and I almost

had to force the food down. The bird resented me, it was quite independent. It began to feed itself from a bowl within half a day.

I began listening to the baby magpies beg for food from the trees near our yard, as I so often love to do this time of year, and began to wonder how long before they would fledge. From the sound of the call and the appearance of the little head sticking out above the nest, I estimated that it wouldn't be long at all.

An idea struck me! Why not try to release this Salisbury bird with the locals? Has it ever been done before? Normally I would phone the guru or someone and ask for past history on this sort of thing, however I didn't want to dull my hopes so I decided to just try it myself. I was ready to pounce and grab it before the locals killed it however.

I banded the Salisbury bird, and stood about 10 metres from the local's nest tree. As I released it, the juvenile squawked the distress call, and the locals came from nowhere swooping madly at me. The Salisbury bird tried to fly, but ended up in the grass, as it couldn't get 'lift off'. Should I keep it till it can fly, or would this reduce the chances of my experiment working? The dominant male sat on a dead branch above the S (Salisbury) juvenile, with food in its beak appearing to wait for the S bird to beg. The S bird didn't beg so it flew into the nest nearby and fed that baby instead.

After about 30 minutes I retrieved the S bird from the grass and placed it high up in a tree 3 metres from the nest tree. Minutes later it began chatting to the juvenile in the nest! It was quite comical to watch/listen to. So far there had been no aggression from the adult locals. I had waited over an hour, then decided to leave them to it.

I returned after an hour and found the S bird sitting next to one of the adults. It was begging but the adult had no food. There was no aggression, and I got swooped again. Note that I hadn't been swooped by these magpies since we moved here which was 13 years ago! Also note that I do not feed the local magpies. I figured all was well and once again left them to it.

After a couple more hours, I took my video camera to zoom in on S to make doubly sure it was S. I was able to zoom in on the band, this confirmed it wasn't their young. I took video footage of the adults now feeding S. I couldn't believe my eyes, but the camera never lies they say?

The following day their young fledged. What a good guess I thought! I really believe that it was the timing of it all. The S bird was almost identical in size and age to their own young, therefore they must have believed that when I released S to them, that it was in fact their own young just fledged and that somehow I had picked it up. Getting the bird to squawk distress calls prior to its release also helps. A little squeeze is usually all it takes! It initiates protective behaviour in the adults, i.e. the way they swooped me.

Two days later, my dog grabbed their juvenile which had ventured into our yard. The magpies don't breed directly in our house yard for this very reason, and haven't done so for 6 years now – the age of the dog! The rear claw was just hanging, so I snipped the remainder of skin off. It will be fine without that claw for now and it wasn't bleeding profusely. It was however in severe shock, and 24 hours in the humidicrib treated that problem.

It begged to me for food almost immediately – what a difference in behaviour to the S bird which at the same age wouldn't have a bar of me. I banded the local juvenile on the other leg, and I now watch the two (keeping out of the house yard!) around the property on a regular basis. It has been 2 weeks and they are both doing well. There are only about 3-4 adults in the family group and it is getting dry now, however they seem to be using the vegetable garden quite regularly for insect collection – earwigs and slugs I hope.

I spoke to a very experienced bird care member after all of this, and she wasn't aware of it having been tried, and it wasn't generally recommended. Please don't attempt this unless you can stay with the bird at all times – i.e. use your own house for the base, and be almost 100% sure that

the young of the family you release to are the same age. Oh, my son called him 'Wanganeeen', as Power had just won the Grand Final of course.

Anita

Galah Baby Sitting

This Spring I received a very young galah, which during the day I put outside in a carry cage where I could watch it through my office window. The local galahs took an interest in the young galah so I put a bowl of food beside its cage.

For the next two days the local pair of galahs fed the young one - not enough to relieve me of the task but enough to convince me I'll probably be able to release it into the local small flock when it is weaned.



The young galah was then transferred to a cocky cage and for the next two days the wild galahs took over fully, the feeding of the young galah. They choked it incredibly full (and very quickly) and its crop when they had finished was as hard as a rock. The feed lasted all night and it didn't want me to feed it in the morning. When I fill it up its crop is very spongy. They obviously feed a much drier mix and the added bonus was it didn't cry out every time it saw me. The young galah's droppings changed totally

too. With my feeding they are light green and sloppy. With their feeding it's very dark green-black and proper looking parrot poo. We don't have many galahs around here so it was pretty amazing that this pair came in to feed it - and helped it to be a much happier baby.

Unfortunately the locals have tired of their new baby and although I leave a bowl of seed on top of the cage for them, they now only feed it small amounts leaving me to finish - maybe they are trying to wean it.

The young galah has now been joined by a galah about the same age, raised by another BCCS member.

Pam

Rescue of Young Birds Found on Ground

With the onset of Spring, the BCCS Conservation Sub Committee sent the following information to newspapers. It was published in the Messenger Press and The Courier at Mount Barker published a feature article on the subject. The information is now also available on the BCCS website.

With the approach of the baby bird season, the Bird Care and Conservation Society would like to offer some advice regarding the "rescue" of young birds found on the ground. Some general rules apply:-

If not completely feathered, all nestlings need to be taken into care. All parrots, lorikeets, swallows, martins, doves and pigeons, regardless of feathering need to be rescued, as their parents will not feed them on the ground.

If the parent birds are present, young magpies, Murray magpies, noisy miners, wattle birds, honeyeaters (all young which have left the nest and are learning to fly) should be placed in a tree and watch kept (discreetly) to ensure the parents are defending.

If the young bird is found late in the day, take into care, feed overnight (with advice on diet from BCCS) and attempt to reunite with parents the following day.

Juvenile blackbirds often found in suburban

gardens, particularly in hot weather, leave the nest when still unable to fly and hide on the ground where the parents feed them. If found, relocate to a protected area of the garden and check the adult knows where they are.

All juvenile raptors (owls, falcons, other birds of prey) should be rescued and help sought for their care.

Mother duck and ducklings found in backyards and swimming pools need to be transported (or carefully shepherded) to the nearest river or pond. Ducklings left in swimming pools will die. The parent duck must be caught first. If the parent flies off it will not return. On release at their new home, let the ducklings out first, then the parent. Do not release ducklings without their parent.

Keep dogs and cats away from young birds. If a magpie is swooping aggressively, find an alternative route or wear a large brimmed hat or carry an umbrella. The magpie is protecting its territory and young and will only exhibit this behaviour for a few weeks.

During hot weather, put out containers of water in a shaded area. If feeding magpies don't feed them only meat as this results in calcium deficiency in their young.

If unsure what to do, ring the Bird Care & Conservation Society for advice. Phone numbers are in the white pages and on the internet at www.birdcare.asn.au. The Bird Care & Conservation Society has also produced a book called "Caring for Rescued Birds" available for purchase through the Society and available for loan from local libraries.

Freezers

The BCCS's recent application for a grant from the Department of Family & Community Services, (Volunteer Small Equipment Grant- Federal Government) for \$2,050 (ex GST) to purchase 2 freezers was successful (BCCS had to pay the GST). The freezers replaced very old and expensive to run ones used to store foods for raptors and other birds.

One of the freezers is to be used at Anita Turton's at Mallala and the other at Anne Whicker's at Upper Sturt.

Tales from the Murray River

They say the nightingale has the most beautiful call in the world but if you have ever heard the call of the pied butcherbird just after sunup on a still crisp morning you would question the judge's choice. It was the mate of one of these birds that was the problem. We arrived at our Murray shack for a two week school holiday break, to find the bird very weak with a badly infected leg. It could still just fly but was obviously in trouble. We decided to intervene.

Fortunately one of us was on antibiotics so we crushed up just a small amount twice a day and mixed it with dog food, boiled rice and cheese. We felt it would die anyhow, so it was worth a try. After a few days it began to feed well and over the next two weeks improved to the extent where the leg healed and it obviously was over the worst.

That bird or one of its offspring with a now small band of family still delights us with its beautiful call. I like to think that family has increased because of our intervention with nature.

Again at our shack one beautiful day, while sitting under the huge box gum, where the corellas had landed, I looked up and saw the most fascinating and wonderful sight.

I have never seen it repeated in all the 20 years we have owned the shack. Stretched almost half across the blue sky were 147 pelicans (I counted them and so did Alison) following one behind the other with several pelicans up in front forming an arrowhead. We watched them until they disappeared over the sheoaks and red gums in the distance still remaining in the one long line.

We often see flocks of pelicans flying over in formation, but always just a few birds forming each arrow and all still heading in the same direction. I wonder where they were headed and why in such an unusual long formation. Has anyone else seen a sight like this?

Wendy B

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POSTAGE PAID

Print Post Publication PP 531725/00016

If undeliverable, return to

The Editor,
Bird Care & Conservation Society Magazine
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Adelaide SA 5000



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BCCS Book, T-shirt and Cap
The following items are available from Bird Care



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BCCS Cap - 1 size fits all \$12