

The Brush Cuckoo *Cacomantis variolosus* relies on other birds to rear its young. In September 1984 a young cuckoo was seen being fed by Yellow-tinted Honeyeaters *Lichenostomus flavescens*.
 The Australian Grebe *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* was seen with four chicks in April 1984.
 The Buff-banded Rail *Rallus philippensis* was seen with chicks in January 1984 and in February 1985.
 The Wandering Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna arcuata* was seen with a mate and 13 chicks late in April 1984. They were seen again six weeks later.

BIRD WATCHING OBSERVATIONS

L.P. TOLHURST

UNIDENTIFIED MANNIKIN

On 20 September, 1986, at 17:30 hrs I was watching a flock of Grey-headed Mannikin *Lonchura caniceps* on the campus of Pacific Adventist College, near Port Moresby. Together with this species there were a few Chestnut-breasted Mannikins *Lonchura castaneothorax*. At a range of about 40 feet, I saw a mannikin that resembled neither of these two species. The head, throat and chest were all dark: - black or dark grey. The dark colour on the chest was uniform and extended well down, about half way down the front of the body. The cut off line for the dark colour was quite distinct. The belly was white. There was no chestnut colour on the front of the bird at all. At first I thought that it might be a Black-breasted Mannikin *Lonchura teerinki*. However it seems to be unlikely as this species is listed as being a mountain resident, found from at 1000 feet upwards. The College Campus is at only about 150 m. The bird did not look like an immature Grey-headed Mannikin which is often seen on Campus. The only other possibility would be an immature Chestnut-breasted Mannikin.

FEEDING HABITS OF BRAHMINY KITES *HALIAETUR INDUS*

During the winter months of 1986 at the Pacific Adventist College, near Port Moresby, I several times observed Brahminy Kites feeding on the larvae and the pupae of a species of moth or butterfly that feeds on *Delonix regia* leaves. To achieve this the birds would circle over the target tree for some time getting lower and lower, then when about twenty feet above the top of the tree, they would dive down and clutch with their talons at the selected larva or pupa and fly off with what they had succeeded in getting. The trees involved were very close to inhabited houses, some within only 10 m.

OBSERVATION OF A MIGRATING SACRED KINGFISHER *HALCYON SANCTA*.

During the weekend of 27-31 March 1986 I visited the village of Domara, a few miles to the south-east of Cape Rodney, Central Province. On the morning of 30 March I joined a group of village people for a fish drive on the main reef, which was some ten miles offshore. Four large canoes set off with about 80 men. We left a little after sunrise. We travelled south for about two miles, by

which time the weather changed, and a large rain-storm began to lash us, with strong winds. All four canoes took shelter to the leeward of a large sand-bar, where we were protected from the wind and waves. Here we waited out the storm. While riding at anchor, I noticed a Sacred Kingfisher flying around the canoes trying to land. After several attempts the bird crashed into my canoe. One of the men close to me picked it up and gave it to me. It was wet through to the skin, and obviously exhausted. For some time it tried to peck at me, but soon settled down. From the time of year I assume that the bird was on migration from Australia, and had been caught in the bad weather when only a few miles from its destination. During the hour that we waited out the storm the kingfisher lay relaxed in my hand.

When the rain and wind ceased to be a problem, we began to move away from our sheltered waters, and then we turned South to head towards the main reef still some five or six miles distant at that point of the coast. As soon as the canoe turned south, the kingfisher began to struggle in my hand and tried to get away from me.

This kingfisher had been flying in a northerly direction, and at the time no sun was visible, due to the very heavy cloud cover. Since the worst of the squall was now between us and the land, we could not see the land either. My conclusion, as I observed the bird's behaviour was that it struggled to get free at the precise moment we turned south, because it sensed that we were taking it in the direction from which it had just come, and away from the land to which it wished to travel. I kept the bird safely on the canoe all day, and took it back to land in the evening. During the night it got away and made its escape, safely.

KITES AND OTHER BIRDS FEEDING ON CATERPILLAR INFESTATIONS IN POINCIANA TREES *DELONIX REGIA* IN POPONDETTA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

G.E. CLAPP

INTRODUCTION

In the garden of house No. 2, Bambusi Street, Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea, stands a poinciana tree *Delonix regia*. This tree, as well as several other tree species in the town, is periodically subject to severe attack by small brown/black, hairless caterpillars, presumably the larvae of a moth. If not themselves subject to predation these caterpillars can strip the leaves until the tree is almost bare. Between 1980 and 1982 I noticed that several species of birds, some of them surprisingly large to be taking such small prey, were taking advantage of these caterpillar plagues and were using them opportunistically as superabundant food sources.