

Notes on an old Upper Hunter egg collection

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Most of our knowledge of the birds in the Upper Hunter Region in the early 20th Century stems from the publicly available literature published in *The Emu* (Stuart 2009). Previously unpublished information about Upper Hunter birds from the periods 1918-1921 and 1927-1928 forms the basis for the material below. In those years, Eric McPhee, an uncle of Greg Newling (GN) worked at Belltrees as an assistant to H.L. White. McPhee started an egg collection and his records (since passed to GN) included where the eggs originated. Many eggs were taken from nests at locations in the Upper Hunter – principally Belltrees, also Moonan Flat, Stewarts Brook and Broke.

The collection included eggs from 67 species in the Upper Hunter. Many of these were known from *The Emu* to breed locally (Stuart 2009). The following additional species are from McPhee's notes; those shown in **bold** font are additions to the list of known Hunter Region birds of that era (Stuart 2009). **Stubble Quail** *Coturnix pectoralis*; **Brown Quail** *Coturnix ypsilophora*; **Australasian Grebe** *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae*; **Tawny Frogmouth** *Podargus strigoides*; White-faced Heron *Egretta novaehollandiae*; Nankeen Kestrel *Falco cenchroides*; Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*; **Bush Stone-Curlew** *Burhinus grallarius*; Black-fronted Dotterel *Elsayornis melanops*; **Red-backed Kingfisher** *Todiramphus pyrrhopygius*; Speckled Warbler *Chthonicola sagittata*; White-throated Gerygone *Gerygone albogularis*; Striated Pardalote *Pardalotus striatus*; Olive-backed Oriole *Oriolus sagittatus*; Pied Butcherbird *Cracticus nigrogularis*; Australian Magpie *Cracticus tibicen*; Grey Fantail *Rhipidura albiscapa*; Australian Raven *Corvus coronoides*; White-winged Chough *Corcorax melanorhamphos*; Hooded Robin *Melanodryas cucullata*;

Horsfield's Bushlark *Mirafrja javanica*; Rufous Songlark *Cincloramphus mathewsi*; **Brown Songlark** *Cincloramphus cruralis*; **White-backed Swallow** *Cheramoeca leucosterna*; Mistletoebird *Dicaeum hirundinaceum*; **Zebra Finch** *Taeniopygia guttata*; **Double-barred Finch** *Taeniopygia bichenovii*; **European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis*.

McPhee named the Striated Fieldwren *Calamanthus fuliginosus* as breeding at Belltrees (in records for August 1921 and December 1927). This is considerably beyond the modern range for that species and we have interpreted the records to be for Speckled Warbler, which in that era was commonly called the Little Fieldwren. There were two breeding records for the Red-backed Kingfisher (at Belltrees in December 1919 and Moonan Flat in January 1920) – this species is now considered to be an accidental visitor to the Region. There was also a Crimson Chat *Epthianura tricolor* nest at Belltrees in September 1919, which complements a breeding record from Merriwa in 1924 and birds present there in 1919 (Stuart 2009).

McPhee's notes about the Upper Hunter egg collection extend the known Hunter Region list for the early 20th Century to 215 species. There are now confirmed breeding records for 109 of them.

REFERENCE

Stuart, A. (2009). Early Hunter Region avian records. Part 1. 1901-1925 Articles in *The Emu*. *The Whistler* 3: 40-51.