

Honeyeater, *Myzantha flavigula*; Blue-faced Honeyeater, *Entomyzon cyanotis*; Silver-crowned Friarbird, *Philemon argenteiceps*, and Little Friarbird, *P. citreogularis*.

Horsfield Bushlark, *Mirafra javanica*, were abundant on the well grassed flats. Not only were six species of finches recorded but they were widespread. Parties were to be found wherever there was clear running water, even within a dozen feet of the shore of Admiralty Gulf. Though the Zebra Finches, *Poephila guttata*, were numerous in the "pindan" they seemed to avoid the real Northern Kimberleys. Species recorded were Black-ringed Finch, *P. bichenovii annulosa*; Pictorella Finch, *Lonchura pectoralis*; Crimson Finch, *Neochmia phaeton*; Long-tailed Finch, *Poephila acuticauda*; Masked Finch, *P. personata*, and last, but far from least, the Gouldian Finch, *Chloebia gouldiae*. More than once parties of several hundred were recorded, the majority of which were juveniles, "greenies". Black-headed birds predominated.

Olive-backed Orioles, *Oriolus sagittatus*, were most vocal. Great Bowerbirds, *Chlamydera nuchalis*, were more common in the sandstone environment.

Crows, *Corvus orru*, were not common, and the same applied to the Magpie, *Gymnorhina tibicen*. Not a day passed without hearing the melodious call of the Pied Butcherbird, *Cracticus nigrogularis*, but an unexpected record was the Silver-backed Butcherbird, *C. argenteus*, in the "Valley of Peace".

Anybody planning to visit the Northern Kimberleys must remember that after leaving Derby or Wyndham there are neither shops nor petrol stations. Petrol can only be obtained by the courtesy of the station owners, and it would be wise to ensure, by writing beforehand, that such supplies will be forthcoming. Mount House and Doongan Stations would probably oblige. Other properties either carry no reserves or are definitely averse to providing petrol at all. The traveller by his, often, poor manners is not all that popular.

I would not advise anyone to attempt to go to the Mitchell Plateau, except in a four-wheel drive vehicle. The crossing of the King Edward River is a rough one and in places the sand can be heavy.

With these exceptions, as I have already said, the roads are good.

Hall's Babbler in New South Wales

By H. L. NICOLETTE HOOPER, Melbourne

My interest in Hall's Babbler, *Pomatostomus halli*, began in September 1969, when Mr. M. Schroeder, of Cunnamulla, showed us where to find a party of these birds along the Cunnamulla/Eulo Road, south-west Queensland.

I was on a leisurely tour with my sister-in-law, Mrs. Dorothea Mules. We had travelled north from Wilcannia, New South Wales, to Hungerford; camped for two nights by Lake Dynever, west of Thargomindah, continuing on to Quilpie, Charleville and Cunnamulla.

It was when I saw Hall's Babbler near Cunnamulla that I thought it possible we had already seen the birds on two occasions, and mistakenly supposed them to be the White-browed Babbler, *P. superciliosus*. Firstly, on the property Lake Station, by Lake Dynever, on August 28, 1969, a small party of about six birds feeding among low dry scrub. Secondly, east of Quilpie, some miles west of the Paroo Crossing, on September 1, 1969, when my notes state "a pair of Brolga caused us to stop; it was such a good area we stayed". Among the 35 species of birds recorded there were "White-browed Babblers with a nest".

Realising that these two sightings could have been *P. halli*, not *P. superciliosus*, I took particular note of the Cunnamulla group.

Pomatostomus halli was first collected and identified as a new species by the Harold Hall Expedition in 1963, from Tyers Estate, near Langlo Crossing, Queensland. In 1972, W. Horton, B. Brokenbrow and Mr. H. B. Gill netted, banded and examined *P. halli* near Opalton, and on the Winton-Boulia Road, Queensland.

On September 2, 1973, I camped for two nights at Mootwingee Historic Site, 80 miles (128 km) north-east of Broken Hill, New South Wales, in the Bynguano Ranges. These 12,000 acres (4800 ha) are managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, New South Wales. A fascinating area of rugged sandstone hills, much eroded by time and weather and containing caves with aboriginal engravings and paintings. Many rocky gullies and water-courses where vegetation is thick with eucalyptus and acacia spp., Cypress pines, eremophila and mints, to name but a few. There is permanent water, open areas are well grassed, and this year a mass of ephemerals.

On the provisional bird-list, obtainable at the Ranger's office, among the 110 species listed is White-browed Babbler. Several small parties of these birds were met during a morning spent walking along one of the marked tracks in the park. While stalking a party of eight birds, it appeared that they were *P. halli*, not *P. superciliosus*. They were feeding among scattered acacia scrub and grassland below the sandstone slopes, turning over bits of bark and dead wood on the ground, allowing me to come within 20 feet (6 m) before flying to the next bush. Unlike the White-browed and Grey-crowned Babbler, *P. temporalis*, which tend to weave up the branches of a tree when disturbed and fly from a height, gliding down to the next tree, *P. halli* tends to fly low, and keep low, calling in true babbler chatter though less noisily. In this group were two young birds, indistinguishable from the others in plumage, but one or the other occasionally called for food and an adult would oblige. Whether this was the same bird each time I could not say, as the party moved fairly quickly from cover to cover, feeding as they went, or, on my approach, in very low flight.

In general appearance *P. halli* closely resembles *P. superciliosus*; the white eyebrow, white throat and upper breast, dark brown elsewhere, and white tip to the tail. However, *P. superciliosus* is white



Hall's Babblers showing the dark abdomen sharply demarcated from white throat.

Plate 42

Photo by H. L. N. Hooper

from throat to abdomen, while *P. halli* has a dark brown lower chest and abdomen. The merging of the white into the dark brown feathers is more definite in some birds than others, and the amount of white on the breast also varies. This may possibly be in immatures, as the type specimen is described as "abdomen sharply demarcated from white throat".

In *P. superciliosus* the white brow appears longer and thinner; in *P. halli* it almost bulges from the head, is thicker and a pure white. The dark crown of the bird is not visible in the photograph. In general appearance, I consider that *P. halli* in the field appears to be a darker, neater bird than *P. superciliosus*; is quieter and more easily approached. It has an overall tidier and more clean-cut appearance.

At Mootwingee, Hall's Babbler is easily found; small parties were seen in the open country and in the rocky gullies, always among the low trees and shrubs. Breeding appeared to be over, though a longer stay might have proved otherwise. Several nests were seen, and the pair that were photographed chased three Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, *Acanthagenys rufogularis*, from an acacia containing a nest.

REFERENCES

- Cowles, G. S., 1964. "A new Australian Babbler", *Emu*, 64 : 1-5.
 Horton, W., 1973. "Hall's Babbler near Opalton, Queensland", *The Australian Bird Bander*, 11 : 33-34.