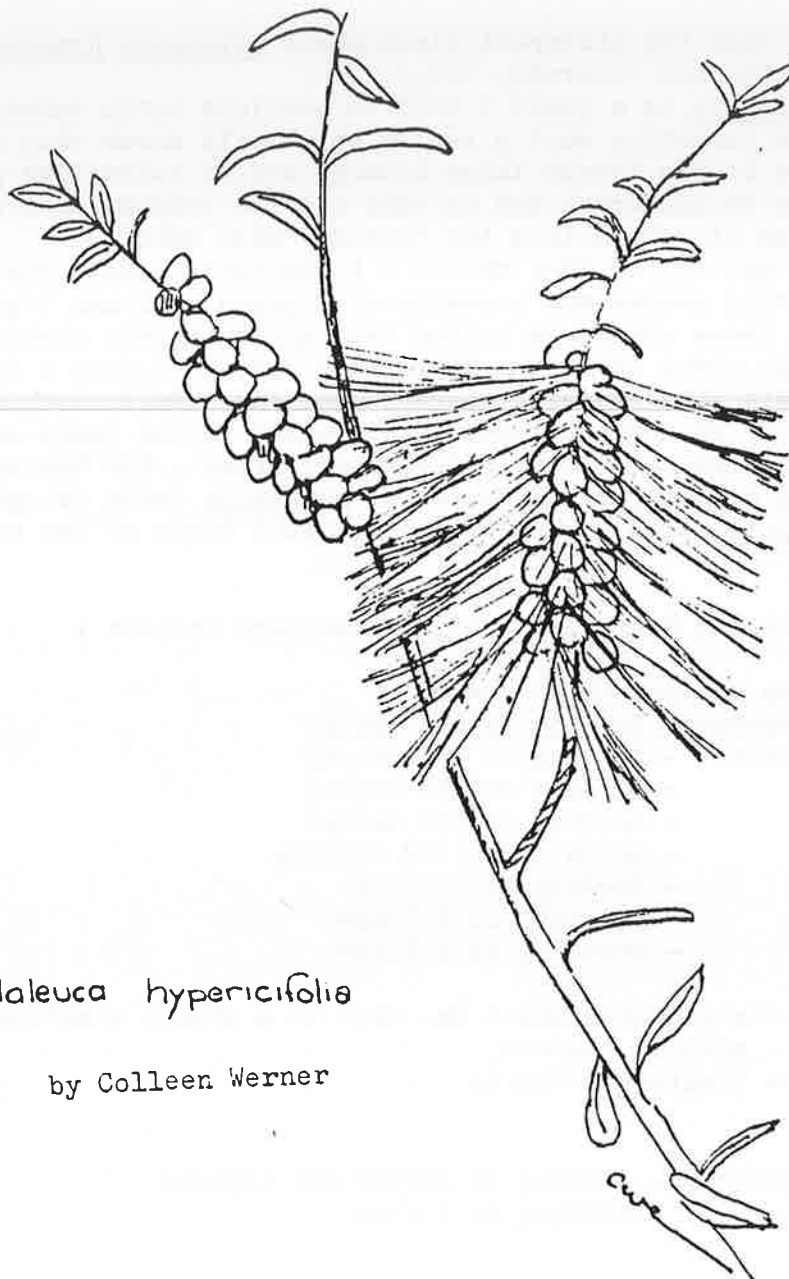


S.G.A.P. BIRDS AND NATIVE PLANTS
STUDY GROUP

Newsletter No. 5

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Melaleuca hypericifolia

by Colleen Werner

MELALEUCA HYPERICIFOLIA : Red Flowering Paperbark

Melaleuca hypericifolia is found growing naturally in N.S.W. on the south and central coast and the central tablelands. It is found growing along coastal headlands and in damp areas.

I consider it to be an attractive garden plant. Under good conditions, "in the wild", in damp forest sites it will grow to 6m. high but in more exposed situations along the coast it may only reach 1m.. It is a dense shrub, often becoming as wide

One of it's best attributes, apart, of course, from being bird attractive is it's hardiness. With summer watering it will grow in almost any situation to provide a good screen or windbreak. One situation to which it is not well suited perhaps is described by Jenny Rich (Eastwood, N.S.W.) "Only one of three plants has survived, and the cause of death seems to be too much moisture, even though the soil is rarely wet for long - the soil type is clay-loam." Generally though it's hardiness makes it a good specimen for tough areas such as along footpaths or around carparks.

Now to the birds. The spikes are attractive to honeyeaters, the foliage and spikes will be done over by insect gleaners and the fruits provide food for larger seed eaters. It's dense habit makes it an excellent shelter plant to have in the garden, even when not flowering such a plant will help make a garden more attractive to small birds.

Having said all this two different views about Melaleuca hypericifolia....

.... from Val McConchie (Emerald, Vic.)

"M. hypericifolia is a plant I tend to overlook until summer, and I wonder then how I could have forgotten what a really worthwhile shrub this is. Apart from being bird attractive it has lovely large brushes and an attractive pendulous habit. It makes a good hedge or windbreak and is very easy to propagate. A good plant to share among friends as it seldom lets the "native" side down!

To propagate I take tip or side shoots - I generally remove the soft top leaves and use "STRIKE" cutting powder and a medium of 3 parts sand and 1 part peat moss. I have a propagating frame which has bottom heat and automatic misting. Cuttings take from six to eight weeks to root and are then potted on into a fairly open mix."

.... and from Bela Bard-Brucker (Hoppers Crossing, VIC.)

"Personally, I am not particularly attracted to the plant as it needs regular pruning to maintain good form and no woody areas - for the same reason I don't plant Melaleuca diosmifolia. I prefer M. nesophila (even though it grows bigger), M. spicigera and M. pulchella. M. hypericifolia would be one of the hardiest melaleucas in my experience."

Birds noted utilising M. hypericifolia by members include :

Kingacote, S.A. in two bushes in the garden

Purple gaped honeyeater	- feeding on the nectar
New Holland honeyeater	- feeding on the nectar
Little wattlebird	- feeding on the nectar
Red wattlebird	- feeding on the nectar
Grey fantail	- perching in the foliage
Silvereye	- feeding on insects
Brown thornbill	- perching in foliage
Sparrow	- perching in foliage

Blaxland, N.S.W. in three bushes about 2m. high in a street planting

Eastern spinebill	- probing flowers
Crimson rosellas	- feeding on fruits

Werribee, Vic.

White-plumed honeyeaters	- feeding on nectar and insects
Blackbird	- nesting in foliage

Mt. Riverview, N.S.W.

Yellow-faced honeyeater	- probing flowers carried in October
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Eastwood, N.S.W.

"Although we have a number of Eastern rosellas, Noisy miners and Red wattlebirds visiting the garden the garden each day, they do not seem to find the plant very attractive - far preferring Callistemons and Grevilleas."

Eastwood, N.S.W. - within busy shopping centre

Eastern spinebills	- feeding at flowers
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Looking for a reason to take a walk in the bush or needing some incentive to look more closely at the bush? Then become a "Banksia Atlasser".

The Banksia Atlas is the first Australia-wide plant mapping project to be undertaken using volunteers. It is planned to run from 1984 to 1986. The aims of the Atlas include to provide more information about the habitat, distribution and abundance, and hence current conservation status, of the banksias as well effects of fire and interrelationships with birds, mammals and insects.

Should you decide to join up as an Atlasser you will be supplied with Sight Record Sheets, Field Notebook and an Instruction Booklet with a Supplementary Field Guide. For yourself you will need a map from which to take latitude and longitude co-ordinates and a suitable field guide - either "Banksias" by Alex George, published by Kangaroo Press, 1984, or "Field Guide to Banksias" by Ivan Holliday and Geoffrey Watton, published by Rigby, 1975. The supplementary field guide in the Atlasser's kit is a supplement to "Field to Banksias". Since the field guide's publication in 1975 a taxonomic revision of the banksias has taken place. Life has become more complicated. Instead of 57 species of banksias we are now coping with 72 species and 15 varieties, not to mention 7 changes of name.

When equipped and ready to venture out the Atlasser records information to identify the location and describe the habitat, the banksias present, their responses to fire and any pollinators observed.

The value of the Atlas will be in part dependent on the number of volunteers participating. The information gathered about pollinators should be of great interest to us all so if you need an excuse to escape into the bush for a while here is an ideal one.

Further information about the Atlas can be obtained from
Banksia Atlas
W.A. Wildlife Research Centre,
P.O. Box 51,
Wanneroo, W.A. 6065.

EASTERN SPINEBILL - A PUZZLE UNSOLVED!

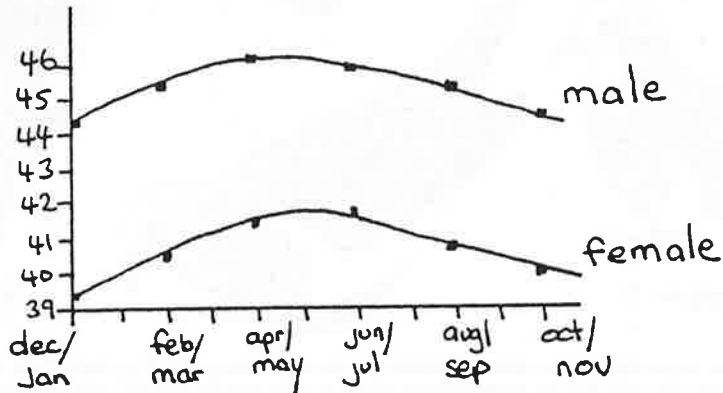
In the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union Report No. 11 1984 "Barren Grounds Bird Observatory Report 1982-84" an article by one of the Barren Grounds wardens Richard Jordan

"What is happening to the spinebill's bill?"

The figure below shows how the total head length (measured from the back of the skull to the tip of the bill - Rooke, 1976) varies throughout the year. This probably reflects a change in bill length - and the variation is similiar in both males and females (Jordan, R., Seasonal Variation in total head length for the Eastern Spinebill at Barren Grounds Reserve, New South Wales - in prep).

The figure shows variation in total head length in terms of monthly means, but a number of individual birds, recaptured on several occasions, showed the same seasonal changes. Is the effect due to differences in foraging strategy through the year? I hope to find out."

total head - mm



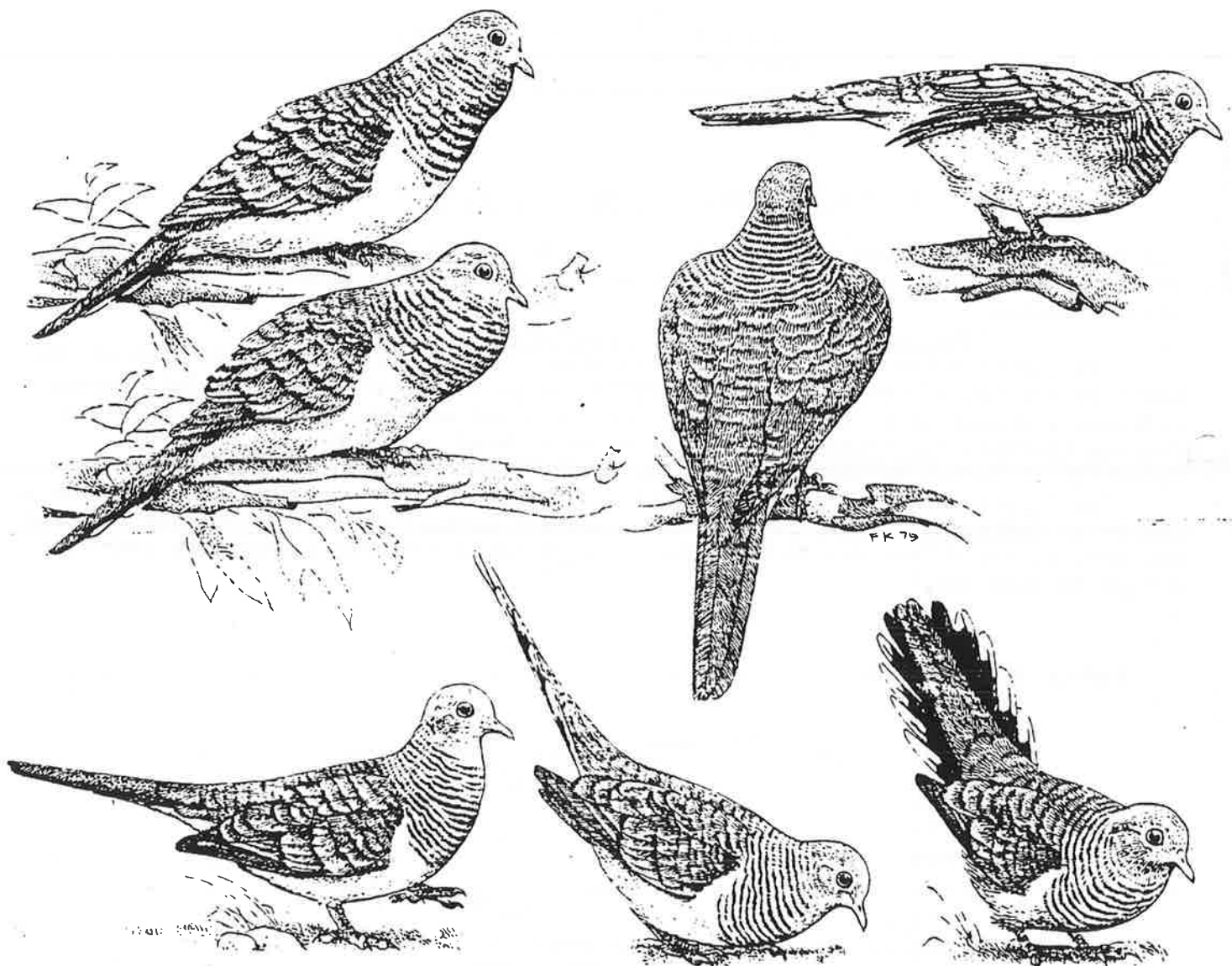
seasonal change in total head length for

I have been studying the Peaceful Dove (P.D.) over the past 12 months towards an M.Sc degree. My work so far has been mainly on food preferences in P.Ds. The results to date indicate that P.Ds mainly feed on small seeds of a wide range of plants particularly of the grass-like families and some herbs including many introduced species. This may explain why they are found over most of Australia. Panicum spp, Sorghum spp, Hackelochloa sp. and Euphorbia spp are amongst their favourites.

P.Ds are normally found in fairly open woodland or dry sclerophyll forest. This is not surprising since patches of bare ground are needed to find seeds. Also proximity to a permanent water supply appears to dictate where they live permanently and breed. The closely related Diamond Dove (Geopelia caneata) is able to eat as great a variety of seed types. P.Ds are scattered throughout the Blue Mountains and as such may be attracted to your garden by regularly providing small seed mixtures (Panicum and millet) and water.

The size and appearance of P.Ds are very similar in both sexes. Their colour is basically grey with a bluish tinge to it. Black bar markings occur about the throat and neck with black edging to the feathers of the rump, back and wing coverts, giving a scalloped effect. The ring or cere surrounding the eyes is blue as is the bill and the feet and legs are greyish pink. Sexing of birds is difficult. Some idea can be obtained by comparing birds, the clarity of the body hues and the depth of the blue colour in the eye cere usually indicates a male bird.

The following sketches are from "Pigeons and Doves of Australia" by H.J. Frith:



Peaceful Dove Top left: A male at the beginning (above) and end (below) of the advertising call. Top right: Two examples of a wing-lifting display. Bottom: A male at the high point (left) and the low point (centre) of the bowing display; frontal view of a male at the low point of the bowing display (right)

If you are unsure of the sex of a P.D. observation of their behaviour would confirm their sex as males will bow towards a female and walk towards her while

PROPAGATING BANKSIAS

In response to queries regarding the propagation of banksias:-

From Bob Bannon (Bray Park, Qld.)....

"I have only tried Banksia ericifolia in small quantities (8-10 at a time). I use sharp, washed river sand in 3 inch tubes, 1 seed per pot. They are usually up in about three weeks. Most of our members have trouble with damping off."

And from an article "Banksia - Propagation, Cultivation and the New Species" by Trevor Blake in S.G.A.P. N.S.W. Region 'Native Plants for N.S.W.', Volume 17 Number 6 December 1982 :-

"Seed Collection and Extraction

Collection of seed, particularly of most of the eastern species, is fairly easy. The seed can be extracted by 'cooking' the cones on a grate over an open fire when you will find that the follicles will open fairly quickly. After heating, simply tap the cones on a hard surface and in most cases the seed will fall out.

Sometimes, if the cones haven't been heated enough you might have to pry open the follicles and flick out the woody looking device in the centre which holds the seeds in place. The device, I believe, is an environmental adaption to protect the seeds from the scorching heat of bushfires. The plant has thus adapted to a fire regime.

After collecting seed, don't store it in a plastic bag or it will sweat and collect fungus; put it in a paper container and label it clearly.

Seed Raising

There are many ways, but one that has proved successful is to sow seed into a well-drained mix and keep it moist but not sodden. Germination should commence in eight weeks or so. The finer Banksia seeds can be sown to a depth of about 5mm., larger seeds can be put in a little deeper.

Another method that has been used is to put down large seed trays containing pots of seeds immersed three-quarters of the way into sand. By keeping the sand moist the mix in the pots is kept moist by capillary action. An interesting method that has come to notice recently involves sowing the seed into a moist mix, as normal, and then covering the lot with newspaper (to keep it completely dark). The whole is then put into a hothouse. As soon as the seed starts to germinate, it is removed from the hothouse and treated normally. It has been found that the number of days for germination has been reduced quite dramatically by this method.

Cuttings

There has been quite a lot of work done with cuttings and it has been found that most species can be grown by this method - using hormone powders.

Grafting

This is something that is still in it's infancy and there have been both encouraging and discouraging results. For rootstocks we need species which are successful in the particular location where we want to grow the plant. Some species that have been successfully used as stocks include:

Banksia ericifolia for B. nutans

Banksia integrifolia for B. grandis; B. laricina; B. occidentalis; B. pilostylis; B. speciosa, and B. violacea."

THE SYDNEY PEPPERMINT AND IT'S VISITORS

A large Sydney peppermint (Eucalyptus piperita subsp. piperita) stands close by and in easy view of our back verandah. "Our" tree has a mallee-like habit with smooth white upper branches from which hang long strips of bark. Having carried large numbers of buds for at least 12 months it is now in full flower and extremely attractive. Flowers are creamy white and hang in large clumps at the end of thin pendulous branches - at first glance it looks as though a large number of bee swarms have settled into the tree. While anticipating a good showing from the tree we were also anticipating a feast of birdlife - laid on at our back door. Well, we had a feast of wildlife but not birds. So far, in the several weeks of flowering, one Noisy friarbird and several bulbuls have investigated the blossoms. The blossoms have however been mobbed by masses of beetles which are about 2cm. long with dark head, yellow band across the thorax, metallic green wings and yellow beneath. The blossoms are literally crawling with them, when it is windy they cluster together and blot out some blossoms completely.

Why are the peppermint flowers not attractive to honeyeaters? Small honeyeaters

In the south eastern part of Australia breeding takes place mainly between spring and summer. P.Ds usually remain in small flocks during the non-breeding season. The nest is a small platform of sticks, twigs and sometimes coarse grasses, Two white oval shaped eggs are laid.

Incubation takes 13 days. The young usually leave the nest about 16 days after hatching. While nesting, both parents share in both incubation and rearing duties.

Young birds have a bill that is horn coloured, the down is silvery grey coloured, the feet and legs have a pale pinkish hue. Their feathers erupt on the sixth day, but by the tenth day their plumage is virtually complete. At this stage some feathers may still be developing in areas not visible to the observer.

In the aviary P.Ds can be kept successfully with small parrots and finches. Aviaries planted with ti trees (Leptospermum spp) would be ideal.

P.Ds are easily fed as any commercial budgie mixture fills their dietary needs as they particularly favour millet and panicum, with other small seeds occasionally. An area of freshly turned earth should be provided regularly as P.Ds like picking in such areas. They also like some rock salt and cuttlefish bone to pick at occasionally. Fresh water must be provided regularly. As all pigeons and doves do they drink by inserting their bill and sucking the water up.

Although the P.D. is a relatively small sombre coloured bird it's interesting behaviour and peaceful callings (something like "hoodle-hoo, hoodle-hoo") makes it a very pleasant addition to your garden.

THE SILKY OAK

Some observations on the Silky Oak (Grevillea robusta) in the western area of Sydney from Lola Smith (Mt. Riverview, N.S.W.).....

October - November - flowering

Birds probing flowers or pecking within the flower spray during this period:-

Noisy friarbirds	Starling
White-cheeked honeyeaters	Spotted pardalote
Yellow-tufted honeyeaters	Oriole
Regent honeyeaters	Sparrow
White-plumed honeyeaters	Crimson rosellas

June - July - Dropped leaves have areas of brown, dry spots where grubs have burrowed between layers.

The following birds seen pecking at the leaves:-

Yellow-faced honeyeaters
White-naped honeyeaters
Striated thornbills

Crimson rosellas spend long periods in the tree biting off leaves and running them sideways through their bill.

September

Pecking at the junction of small branches:-

New Holland honeyeater

AN ORIGMA'S UNUSUAL NEST SITE

The origma (or rock warbler) frequents the sandstone and limestone cliff country about Sydney. It usually builds a large elongated nest about 30cm. in length with a side entrance. This construction looks somewhat messy being made from an assortment of grasses, bark strips, fine roots and moss. Normally this mass is suspended from the ceiling of a rock cavern or ledge, attachment is by means of cobweb. The same nest is used year after year. We found such a nest recently at Glen Alice (about 50km from Lithgow on the western escarpment of the Great Dividing Range). Here the origmas had entered a storage shed through the eaves and had suspended their nest from the shed roof. Being in the way the shed owner had moved the nest to

NATIVE PLANTS FOR STREETS AND PARKS

The following is a list of plant species submitted to the Greening Werribee Committee (an advisory body to the Shire Council) by the Werribee S.G.A.P..

The key has been added by myself.

- 1= Bird attracter - for honeyeaters
 2= Bird attracter - for insect eaters
 3= Bird attracter - for seed eaters

I have taken this particular classification of plants into categories of bird attractive plants from "Grow What Where" by the Australian Plant Study Group. This book considers a wide range of situations and conditions and lists plants suitable for each. These lists are only a starting point. I feel that there are many good bird attractive plants which could be added to "Grow What Where's" lists.

In this following list of plants the emphasis is on dry country plants as Werribee is in the rainshadow of the Otway Ranges and receives only 450 to 500mm. rainfall per annum.

Can you add to this list by contributing names of plants which grow well in your own particular area as street or park plantings and which are also attractive to birds?

STREETS

a) Under powerlines

Acacia pycnartha 1 2 3
 Callistemon pallidus 1
 C. viminalis 1
 Casuarina torulosa 3
 Eucalyptus cosmophylla 1 2 3
 E. lansdowneana 2 3
 E. nutans 1 2 3
 E. platypus 1 2 3
 E. torquata 1 2 3
 E. viridis 1 2 3
 Hakea saligna 1
 H. laurina 1
 H. suaveolens 1
 Melaleuca armillaris 1 2
 M. linariifolia 1 2
 M. styphelioides 1 2

b) No powerlines or median strip

Angophora costata 1
 Casuarina stricta 3
 Eucalyptus cladocalyx 2 3
 E. nana 2 3
 E. ficifolia 1 2 3
 E. leucoxylon 'rosea' 1 2 3
 E. leucoxylon 'macrocarpa' 1 2 3
 E. sideroxylon 'rosea' 1 2 3
 E. occidentalis 2 3
 E. astringens 2 3

COUNCIL RESERVES - any of a) plus

Acacia boormanii 2 3
 A. floribunda 2 3
 Callistemon citrinus 1
 C. speciosus 1
 Casuarina cunninghamiana 3
 Eucalyptus lehmanni 2 3
 E. maculata 2 3
 E. nicholli 2 3
 E. preissiana 1 2

Melaleuca diosmifolia 1 2
 M. hypericifolia 1 2
 M. laterita 1 2
 M. nesophila 1 2
 M. thymifolia 2
 Angophora hispida

NEWS AND NEXT NEWSLETTER

To the following new members welcome:

Mrs. Janet Houghton, Roto, N.S.W. 2745
 Mr. Morton Kaveney, Rosebank, N.S.W. 2480

Next newsletter will be in MAY. The bird for the newsletter will be the RAINBOW LORRIKEET and the plant EUCALYPTUS SIDEROXYLON. Any information that you can contribute about either of these would be most welcome.

Artificial Nest Sites - can you offer any information about these for the next newsletter? ALL contributions are welcomed, by April 20 please.