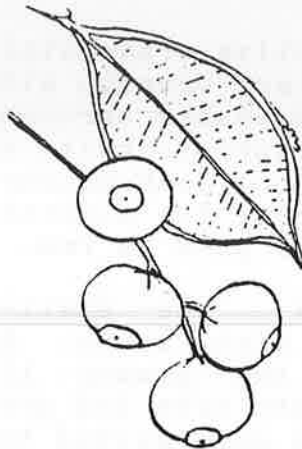


S.G.A.P. BIRDS AND NATIVE PLANTS  
STUDY GROUP

Newsletter No. 7 September 1985

ACMENA SMITHII - THE LILLY PILLY

(Also known as Red Eungella Gum, White Eungella Gum, Scrub Mahogany or Coast Satinash.)



Fruit and leaf of Lilly-pilly.  
*Acmena smithii*

"By this time it was getting dark, and all the glow worms were alight in the shop windows. As they were looking at the beautiful window of Cob Web & Co., a pretty girl passed them. Snugglepot was glad he had on his new clothes and walking-stick.

It was Lilly Pilly, the actress, with her favourite Bull-dog ant. She looked at Snugglepot and Cuddlepie, and they looked at her." .....from May Gibb's "The Complete Adventures of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie"



ACMENA SMITHII - THE LILLY PILLY

NAME DERIVATION:

Acmena, after Acmene, a nymph; Smithii, after a botanist Sir J.E. Smith.

The lilly pilly, of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie fame, is a common tree of the rainforest. It is found in all types of rainforest. It grows as far north as Cape York Peninsula and is one of the few rainforest trees to extend into Victoria.

In the tropics the lilly pilly may grow to 30m and attain a stem diameter of over 1m. Further south it does well to reach 20m. About Wollongong, NSW, it is one of the commonest trees of the rainforest. It grows in the rainforest of the plateau gullies, the escarpment slopes, the coastal plain and on the sea cliffs where conditions are favourable. Under the severe conditions of the sea cliff vegetation it is found as a shrub often 1-2m high.

The lilly pilly is noted as an attractive ornamental tree: leaves ovate and opposite, dark green and paler beneath with the characteristic rainforest "drip tip"; flowers from November through summer are white and fluffy looking due to the many stamens; fruits are 1-2cm in diameter and may be white to quite a distinct pink colour, (I have heard that trees receiving the most direct sun bear the pinkest fruits); bark is smooth and greyish; new leaf growth is pink to red.

A smaller version of the lilly pilly, the small-leaved lilly pilly (*Acmena smithii* var. *minor*) is also known. Leaves and fruits are considerably smaller than those of the common lilly pilly. *Acmena smithii* var. *minor* is a small bushy tree and grows to only 6m with a stem diameter of about 20cm making it well suited to the smaller garden.

The fleshy fruits are edible and are said to make into very good jam. Has anyone a recipe? The birds also find the fruit highly attractive. Satin bowerbirds, crimson rosellas, silvereyes, Australian king-parrots and topknot pigeons will all feed on the fruits on the tree. Wonga pigeons and currawongs make a good meal of fallen fruits. A fruiting lilly pilly in a sheltered gully in the bush is generally an excellent place to sit and wait for the birds.

Propagation of the lilly pilly is from seed. The fruits contain one largish seed each. Has anyone propagated lilly pillies or can anyone offer advice/information regarding propagation? The lilly pilly is said to be reliable in gardens. It prefers well composted soils but will grow in most places if adequate moisture is provided. I have found it slow to get started, perhaps due to a lack of regular watering, but certainly hardy even in exposed situations. It grows on the footpath of our street where it is a neglected but healthy attractive small tree. When in fruit it is frequented by rosellas, king parrots, currawongs, bowerbirds and silvereyes.

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## MORE ON HOLLOWS

The age at which eucalypts form hollows is unknown for most species. However, it is a lengthy process....

In dense stands, *Eucalyptus obliqua*, *E. cypellocarpa* and *E. regnans* do not begin to form hollows until between 110 and 140 years old.

Larger wildlife hollows do not form in blackbutt trees, *E. pilularis*, less than about 200 years old. Longevity is estimated at 300 years.

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## BIRDS OF THE GARDENS OF SOME STUDY GROUP MEMBERS

IN ERMINGTON, NSW from Martin Bouman....

You might recall my letter to you in December 1983 regarding my lack of success in encouraging more native bird species to my garden (in the middle of Sydney suburbia) through planting native plants. Well I am pleased to report that I have made sightings of an Olive-backed oriole and a Spangled drongo! Particularly of interest to our group is that the Oriole loves the berries of my *Trema aspera* ("Poison Peach") shrubs. This shrub grows locally, (most of my garden is devoted to local native plantings), in bushland fragments of Sydney Blue Gum wet sclerophyll communities.

These two birds are migratory and hopefully my plantings will become a stopover for more native birds migrating through Sydney suburbia.

### Sightings of migratory natives in backyard and / or neighbours

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| Species           | Period                               | Comments  |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| O.-B. oriole      | July & Aug 84<br>April 85<br>June 85 | Constant visitor to <i>Trema aspera</i>                   |
| S. drongo         | April 85                             | Observed catching flying insect and pouncing on earthworm |
| Koel              | April 83<br>Nov 84-Jan 85            | Never clearly sighted but incessant calling               |
| Fan-tailed cuckoo | June 83<br>Dec 84                    | -   |

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Common native birds sighted in or near backyard May - July 85

Little wattlebird  
Red wattlebird  
Magpie (blackbacked)

Rainbow lorrieket  
Little raven  
Sulphur-crested cockatoo

- 4 -

In EMERALD, Victoria in bush garden conditions with eucalypts  
(stringybarks) as the upper story.

.....Val McConchie

| BIRD                        | TIME            | PLANTS   |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Eastern spinebill           | year round      |  |
| Thornbills                  | year round      | feeding in shrubbery of Callistemon viminalis, Baeckea virgata, B. linifolia, Prostanthera ovalifolia, P. rotundifolia.                    |
| Rufous whistler             | Nov-Jan         | on eucalypts   |
| White-eared honeyeater      | Jan-July        | Grevillea alpina, G. dimorpha, G. rosmarinifolia.  |
| Scarlet robin               | year round      | in pairs - insect feeding. Works at spider web on outside window ledge.  |
| Grey fantail                | year round      | feeds on insects, seems to arrive with flocks of thornbills  |
| White-throated tree-creeper | year round      | feeds on insects & larvae under bark of eucalypts  |
| Shrike thrush               | year round      | ground feeding - insects, worms, crumbs.   |
| Yellow robin                | March           | not a regular visitor but seen with flocks of thornbills - makes full use of birdbath.   |
| Eastern shrike tit          | March           | on eucalypts   |
| Superb blue wren            | year round      | in pairs - mostly on ground but likes to perch on low branches of shrubs & old wood stump - insect eating                                  |
| Butcher bird                | year round      | visits garden at various times mainly early mornings or late afternoon. seems to include this as part of his territory when rearing young. |
| Little wattle birds         | June, July      | Grevilleas   |
| Black-faced cuckoo-shrike   | Spring & Summer | uses copse of Leptospermum, Acacia myrtifolia, Pomaderris - insect feeding   |
| Yellow-tailed cockatoo      | year round      | seeds of Hakea teretifolia & Acacia elata.   |
| Gang-gang                   | June            | eucalypt seeds.  |
| Eastern rosella             | year round      | eucalypt seeds.  |
| Crimson rosella             | year round      | eucalypt seeds.  |
| Peaceful dove               | year round      | uses bird bath.  |
| Kookaburra                  | year round      | worms, lizards.  |
| Magpie                      | year round      |  |
| Magpie lark                 | year round      |  |
| King parrot                 | summer          |  |

In EASTWOOD, NSW

...Gail Thomas

## THE SATIN BOWERBIRD - SOME NOTES OF INTEREST

### 1) NOTES ON CONSTRUCTION OF BOWER

- Bill Collier, Mt. Riverview, NSW.

(The bower described is in Bill Collier's garden at Mt. Riverview, N.S.W. The garden contains many established native trees and shrubs and backs onto a bushland reserve.)

For the bower dried twigs approximately 1/16 inch tapering to 1/32 inch diameter and between 10 inches and 12 inches long are used. They appear to be from the same area in the gully approximately 100m away.

He assembles the twigs on the front platform of the bower after several flights into the bush to gather supplies.

He then carefully selects the appropriate twig, twining it into the bower. For the platform in front of the bower the main material is dried grass, very light in colour, similar to straw. He does not fly back to the bower with this material, he hops back to the bower with a peculiar hop, dodging in between the low brush.

The bower is pointing N.N.W. There has been no change since the initial erection, (about May this year), only partial dismantle approximately every four weeks.

### 2) NOTES ON RAISING A SATIN BOWERBIRD

- Colleen Werner, Wauchope, NSW.

A couple of days before Christmas we found a young satin bowerbird that had fallen from its nest in a mandarin tree. Citrus trees are often used by these birds as they offer an excellent nesting site with their thorny branches. We established that it was about 20 days old from photos in a National Geographic article.

Boris, as he was called, proved to be very easy to raise and took food almost immediately. He was raised on a mix of wheatgerm, mashed fruit, "pentavite" and dolomite plus insects or soymilk for protein. We just popped this into his beak which he would open automatically on seeing us. When we first found him he was a boney, downy little thing with wing feathers just developing and such a big beak with such beautiful big blue eyes and long legs. He looked hilarious, especially when he stretched, he looked so out of proportion. With the weeks that followed, however, he developed into a wonderful looking bird.

Every opportunity I got I fed him native fruits, preparing him for his day of release. In particular he loved fruit from the creek sandpaper fig (*Ficus coronata*) and local lilly pillies (which I haven't identified yet).

On his day of release we let him out near a clump of these trees where many of his fellow bowerbirds feed. At first he sat on top of his open cage bewildered by his sudden freedom. Then off he flew, a bit wobbly at first, and his landing in a nearby tree was terrible. We have seen him since and have even hand fed him. His flying and landing has improved dramatically with practice. He has also grouped with his fellow bowerbirds and seems to be doing very well.

### 3) NOTES ON THE BOWER WITHIN THE SGAP (BLUE MOUNTAINS GROUP) RESERVE AT GLENBROOK, NSW.

- Judy Smith, Blaxland, NSW.

Bower is in semi-open cover of *Lambertia formosa*, *Pittosporum* sp.

I was told that the bird has been building bowers in the reserve for 2 - 3 years and that he regularly moves the bower plus trimmings from place to place within the reserve.

I could see no evidence of the bower having been "painted". There was a substantial layer of sticks all around the bower.

The SGAP reserve at Glenbrook is kept immaculately tidy except for the area about the bower where the "rubbish" is proudly displayed.

4) NOTES ON THE FOOD CYCLE OF THE SATIN BOWER BIRD  
As observed by Sydney and Reta Vellenga 1960-71.

In an article in "The Bird Observer", August 1985, No 643, Sydney and Reta Vellenga state

Our study took place on the Upper Blue Mountains, NSW. Although Satin Bowerbirds are considered to be fruit-eating we found that they have specialised food cycles through the year. This sequence was:- Late Summer and Autumn - mainly nectar. Winter:- berries and fruit when available, then scavenging for all fruity goods. Spring and Summer:- mainly insects.

These birds have split tongues which may indicate that nectar is important in their diet. It was noticed that their numbers increased in our district in March when the abundant flowering of banksias is evident.

Food plants of the satin bowerbirds listed in their article are:-

Banksia serrata, B. marginata, B. collina, Native figs, Blueberry Ash, Wild Raspberries, Inkweed, Flowering Quince, Yellow Pokers, Holly, English Laurel, Cotoneaster, Hawthorn, Tree Strawberry, Crabapple, Prunus, Apples (from local orchards), Bananas (north coast of NSW), grass shoots, young shoots of trees and shrubs, including eucalypts and vegetables including lettuce, beans, carrot tops or any other green vegetables which were all devoured destructively.

Insects eaten include:- cicadas, grasshoppers, butterflies, moths, Christmas beetles, shieldbugs and woodbugs etc.

If you can add anything further regarding this most fascinating bird please contribute another "note".

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#### NEXT NEWSLETTER

The next newsletter will be in January 1986. The YELLOW ROBIN has missed out in this newsletter and so will be the Bird of the Newsletter next January. Plant of the Newsletter will be the KANGAROO PAW, Anigozanthos spp.

I should like to include an article on WATER IN THE GARDEN so if you can provide any information regarding construction of birdbaths, birds utilising water provided, ability of water to attract birds, problems with cats at birdbaths etc please do so.