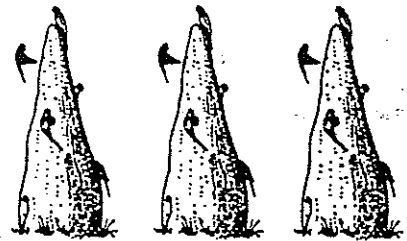


ANTBED



Issue 7

November 1996

An occasional newsletter about the Golden-shouldered Parrot produced by Stephen Garnett and Gabriel Crowley.

This newsletter is for those following the research on the Golden-shouldered Parrot since it began in August 1992. Since intensive research ended in October 1995, the project has been run largely by the very capable Susan Shephard of Artemis Station. This issue describes the work she and her family have been doing as they put into place the Golden-shouldered Parrot Recovery Plan described in *Antbed* 6 a year ago.

Breeding 1996.....

From 1992 to 1995 there was a steady contraction in the range of the Golden-shouldered Parrot on Artemis Station. Each year we hoped this was just seasonal variation, each year we were disappointed. In 1996, however, this trend has at last halted, even if temporarily. Along the eastern edge of the parrot's range nests were found at one site for the first time since 1992 and at another for the first time since 1993. In addition there were four nest attempts at the north-east limit of the range where there had been but one in the previous two years. Reversal of the trend may have been the result of storm-burning in early 1996. It will be interesting to see whether the range returns to 1993 levels next year.

Breeding success also improved. Of 77 nesting attempts recorded 56 are known to have contained eggs or young; the remainder being empty chambers in which eggs were never recorded. Of the nests known to have been active 32 (57%) are thought to have fledged young, compared to an average of the previous three years of 49%.

However not all the news was good. Five adults are known to have died at the nest and the death of one or both adults could have been the cause of the abandonment of eggs or the death of chicks at another 19 nests. Adult mortality is the greatest threat and we hope it will be reduced by reopening the grassy flats.

Nesting Survey

Artemis Station study area is in the north-east of the current range of the Golden-shouldered Parrot but does not extend to the edge of the range to the south and west. To establish other limits to the range, the Shephards explored pockets of remote habitat in the company of owners or employees of nearby

stations. Hundreds of rough and trackless kilometres were searched from motorbike - at the end of one fruitless day the trip diary noted laconically 'both tired with sore arse' - and much apparently suitable habitat was covered. Much was empty of parrots or the mounds showed only the weathered scars of long

abandoned scrapes and nest chambers. Nevertheless a total of 32 recent or active nests were discovered at three sites. These areas, together with surrounding empty habitat, will be the baseline against which trends in range size can be tested when the survey is repeated early next century.

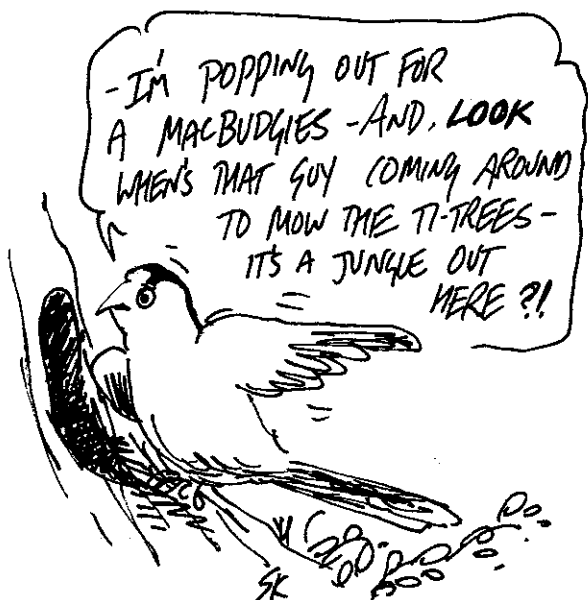


Supplementary Feeding

When the rains come and the grass seed germinates the parrots have to spend longer finding food, and are thought to be more vulnerable to predators. To reduce the chance of predation it was decided to provide the parrots with supplementary food. In October the Shephards constructed two feeders for parrots, a couple of slabs of ironwood

suspended beneath half a 44 gallon drum and surrounded by four inch mesh - a mesh size big enough for parrots to get through but too small for a diving hawk or butcherbird. In these they put budgie seed every few days throughout the wet season to see what happened.

The parrots loved it. Along with a regular army of doves and finches, the local flock of 20-30 Golden-shouldered Parrots fed regularly at the feeder throughout December and January. As in previous years this flock dispersed in late January for breeding sites. However, unlike the last few years at this site, some parrots stayed behind. One pair reared young successfully 50 m from from the feeder and another banded female returned to the site with her young from another nest in June, four months earlier than usual. It is planned to feed the birds again this season, then stop feeding for two years to see whether breeding again ceases near the site. While supplementary feeding is too intensive for long-term habitat useful to know whether it works should the wild population decline to critical levels.



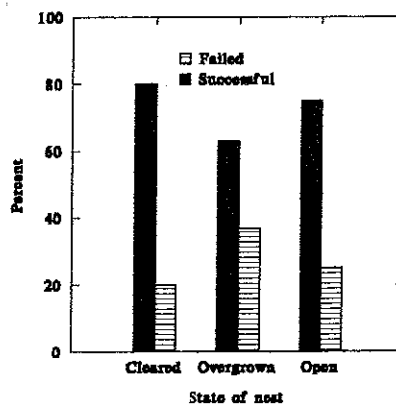
Clearing around nests

One of the big changes on Cape York Peninsula over the last fifty years has been the replacement of grassy flats with ti-tree woodland. We think this has been a major reason for the parrot's decline because when flats on which the parrots nest become overgrown the adults are more vulnerable to predation and the nests more likely to fail. To test this theory most trees within 10 m of a sample of overgrown nests were cleared and their success rate compared to nests

that were left overgrown or were naturally open.

The results so far have been most encouraging. Eight out of ten nests cleared after eggs had been laid produced fledglings compared to 12 out of 19 in dense habitat 12 out of 16 in open habitat. If a similar result is obtained next year clearing around nests will be an option for intensive management should it become necessary. Unfortunately it is not a long term option - the trees will regrow within a few years as thick as

ever and management will be much easier if they can be kept under control using fire.



Conservation Agreement

As part of the Golden-shouldered Parrot recovery process the Shephard family have recently negotiated a conservation agreement with the Department of Environment, the first of its kind on Cape York Peninsula. Under this agreement the Department, with substantial help from the Queensland Ornithological Society and BIRDS Australia, is providing fencing material with which the Shephards will build a new 2500 ha paddock. This paddock and the Shephard's existing bullock paddock are to become the Artemis Antbed Parrot Nature Reserve and will be periodically destocked and burnt in a way that should help both parrots and cattle. If this management regime works we hope the grasslands and their parrots can be returned to large parts of Cape York Peninsula.

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