

# BIRD CARE AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY INC SA



# MAGAZINE



Website: [www.birdcare.asn.au](http://www.birdcare.asn.au)

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C/- Conservation Centre  
120 Wakefield Street, Adelaide SA 5000

ABN 353 538 655 41

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▲  
Adult

►  
Chick

**Masked lapwing (plover )**  
*Vanellus miles*

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BCCS book, T-shirt and cap



**Bulletin Board**

**Christmas Party.....**

*The Christmas season is almost here again and the BCCS Christmas 2005 get together will be on Sunday November 20th at Anne & Greg Whicker's at Lot 19 Upper Sturt Road, Upper Sturt. Come along for an enjoyable time with like minded bird carers. For directions and details see inside magazine.*



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**Wombaroo and Baby Cereal**

*Wombaroo is still available at cost for non-releasable birds and no cost for releasable birds. Baby cereal is also available for \$4.50/kgm. contact Roy 8379 1258*

*\*\*\*\*Anyone wanting to order 10 kilogram bags of baby cereal please phone Pam 8390 3254. The cereal order for 2006 will be made soon so think ahead about what you might need for the next year.\*\*\*\**

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### Christmas Party

The BCCS Christmas party for 2005 is being held on Sunday 20th November from 11 am at the home of Anne and Greg Whicker at Lot 19 Upper Sturt Road Upper Sturt.

This is a new house on 10 acres on the southern side of Belair National Park along side Long Gully.

From the city, head for the western edge of Belair National Park and follow south along this for 4 kilometres then follow signs on Upper Sturt Road, pointing to Crafers Freeway. The property is 300 metres past Footts Hill Road and 150 metres before Olave Hill Road and opposite Gate 21 of Belair National Park (Kaloola Track entrance).

A BBQ will be available. Bring your own food and chair. Tea and coffee provided. Have a relaxing, enjoyable few hours with others interested in our wild birds.

### Membership Status

The address label of your magazine, shows your membership number and subscription paid up to date. If you have renewed your subscription, the date should read 03/06, which means March 2006. (L means life member, F means free mailout).

If you have not renewed but would like to continue to support the efforts of the Bird Care & Conservation Society, please forward your subscription fee to the BCCS Secretary, c/- Conservation Centre, 120 Wakefield Street Adelaide 5000

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### Avian Bird Flu

On Friday, 28th October, Kevin Collins from Fauna Rescue spoke with Ron Sinclair of the Department of Primary Industries and Resources, Animal Health Section and was advised that Kym Critchley has been appointed as the primary contact person for

any cases of suspected Bird Flu in South Australia.

Kym Critchley is at 8207 7908 work hours or mobile 0417 895 062. After hours 8272 4251.

If you find a suspect bird, deceased, use a dust mask of P2 grade to reduce chances of contamination to yourself, wear gloves and eye cover (safety glasses) and then place the bird in a plastic bag.

You must then double or even triple bag the sample and contact Kym Critchley for advice.

For additional information on avian influenza read the articles further on in this magazine.

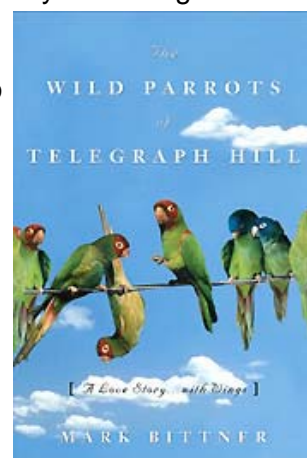
### The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill

In late September, Ann Peters from SA Casting who has the BCCS landline phone number at her office, drew our attention to this new film released here in October.

The 83 minute film is directed by Judy Irving and stars Mark Bittner and avian stars Mingus, Connor, Picasso, Sophie, Olive, Pushkin and Tupelo.

In January 2004, Harmony Books published Mark Bittner's memoir "The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill - A Love Story with Wings." - available in hard cover and paperback. The paperback has gone into a sixth printing and the VHS and DVD (with extras) of the film become available on December 27, 2005.

The love story started in the spring of 1990 when Mark Bittner saw wild parrots on San Francisco's Telegraph Hill and was so curious about their presence that he kept trying to get closer until finally he had them eating out of his hand. This began the friendship and study documented in his book.



When Mark first started watching them, there were only 26 parrots, and he was able to recognize and name every bird. Today there are around 160, and he recognises only a handful. Originally he kept a detailed journal of his day-to-day interactions with the flock, and because he knew them all, was able to report on the most subtle developments and had close relationships with many of the birds.

Most of the birds in the flock are the same species, a parrot known variously as the cherry-headed conure, the red-masked conure, the red-masked parakeet, and the red-headed conure. Some of these names are from the pet trade and others are from the world of ornithology. The scientific name is *Aratinga erythrogenys*. There is also a female mitred conure, or parakeet, in the flock. Its scientific name is *Aratinga mitrata*. She has been breeding with the cherry heads, so there is a fair number of hybrids in the flock. The hybrids are fertile, too.

The cherry-headed conure comes from the west side of the Andes in southern Ecuador and the extreme north of Peru. The mitred conure ranges from central southern Peru through central Bolivia and on south to northwestern Argentina.

The flock was started by wild-caught, imported parrots from South America (many of the original birds wore quarantine bands). Before the practice was restricted in 1993, it was legal to import wild-caught parrots into the United States, and they were brought in by the millions. The cherry heads were inexpensive - often less than \$100 per bird - and the people who bought them found that the wild birds despised captivity. They were noisy and they bit. In some cases, birds escaped; in other cases, they were deliberately released by frustrated owners.

The parrots spend the entire year in various parts of San Francisco. They eat a lot of different foods, juniper berries, pine nuts, walnuts, blackberries, apples, loquats, strawberry guavas, pears, cotoneaster berries, English hawthorn, and so on. They also eat blossoms - one of their favorites is cherry blossoms. [*Very much like our Adelaide rosellas.*]

The parents lay the eggs around the first day of summer. The babies fledge in early Autumn. At that time they are entirely green and nearly as large as their parents. The maximum number of babies per clutch is four. They nest in holes in trees. While they will not start a hole from scratch, they will expand a previously existing hole. They are very particular about nest holes. They have to face a certain direction, and be of a certain size and height above the ground. One of their favorite trees for nesting is the Canary Island date palm. They also nest in Eucalypts.

The film has had good reviews with comments like "This is a documentary which makes the spirit soar. It's the story of a man who's searching for meaning and finds it - unexpectedly and joyously - in a flock of wild parrots who appear in his backyard in San Francisco. It's a beautiful and funny exploration of the extraordinary personalities of each of the birds and a deeply moving account of the relationships that can form between humans and other creatures - and of how much we can learn from those relationships." "That rare documentary that has romance, comedy and a surprise ending that makes you feel like you could fly out of the theatre."

Online references:  
Bittner, M., 2004-2005. Available from <http://www.wildparrotsbook.com>  
<http://www.pelicanmedia.org/wildparrots.html>  
<http://www.wildparrotsfilm.com> [Accessed 30 October 2005]

If you have access to the internet, visit the websites listed above to view some magnificent photographs of these wild parrots.

The book and film and website may inspire Bird Care members to write about their own amazing experiences and friendships with our Australian wild birds and take a lot more photos of the birds.

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### **Pigeons and Avian Influenza**

*The following article is from a press release in late October from the Australian National Pigeon Association.*

The peak body for pigeon fanciers in Australia has supported Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) protocols after

reports that three birds carrying avian flu antibodies were found in an importation from Canada.

But the group, the Australian National Pigeon Association (ANPA) also admitted it was concerned about scare mongering suggesting pigeons are a potential carrier of the virus in the face of substantial scientific evidence to the contrary.

ANPA president Bob Grant, whose organisation represents around 400 breeders of show or fancy pigeons nationwide, said his members fully endorsed the AQIS decision to destroy three pigeons from Canada. "Not only does ANPA agree with this move, our members worked closely with AQIS in devising such protocols when the importation of birds from overseas started in the 1990s," Mr Grant said.

"Many of our members have been involved in shipments of pigeons into Australia since that time and are perfectly satisfied that the system is safe. These latest events certainly bear this out."

Mr Grant said he and ANPA executives across Australia had been contacted by many members in recent weeks who were concerned about the impact that misinformation about pigeons and the avian influenza virus would have on their hobby

"Some of these people have kept pigeons for 40 or 50 years and are worried that the publicity surrounding H5N1 will unduly concern people living nearby, or with whom they have contact," he said.

"I can assure the public that if there were any evidence to support a theory that our pigeons could in any way cause harm to humans, we would be the first to support any actions AQIS might recommend."

"There is no such evidence, and in fact any scientific investigations done in relation to the potential of pigeons as a carrier of this virus has shown they cannot contract the H5N1 strain."

Mr Grant pointed to recent studies, one during the Hong Kong avian flu outbreak in 1997, whereby scientists had actually injected

pigeons with H5N1 to see if they became infected and transmitted the virus.

"Despite their best efforts, they simply could not get the pigeons to contract the virus, let alone pass it on," Mr Grant said. "More recent studies made elsewhere in the world also support these findings."

Mr Grant pointed out that this was in large part due to the fact that pigeons are not poultry, nor are they in any way related to chickens, geese or turkeys.

For more information, contact Bob Grant, ANPA President on (02 9606 0666).

Reference:  
Australian National Pigeon Association, October 2005. Press release. Available from <http://www.anpa.com.au/> [Accessed 30/10/2005]

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## Frequently Asked Question On Avian Influenza

### ***What is avian influenza (bird or poultry flu)?***

There are at least 144 strains of avian influenza, many of which circulate in wild birds at low levels, but which can occur more frequently in waterbirds. Most have mild effects on poultry and are designated 'Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza' (LPAI). But the H5 and H7 'subtypes' can cause massive mortality in poultry and are designated 'High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza' (HPAI).

These HPAI viruses do not normally occur in wild birds. They arise in poultry, where intensive rearing and crowded conditions allow the virus to evolve to a highly pathogenic form. Hence HPAI is also called 'poultry flu'. There have been around 21 HPAI outbreaks in poultry flocks worldwide since 1990.

Wild birds can also be infected with, and killed by, HPAI viruses. They appear to acquire the virus through contact with infected poultry or with facilities used by them.

### ***What is H5N1?***

The H5N1 virus currently circulating is a High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI). This strain of the virus first appeared in Hong Kong in 1997. It evolved in poultry from Low Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (LPAI) viruses that were probably acquired from wild birds.

Conditions in poultry flocks (such as crowding, especially in mixed species groups, and prolonged contact with faeces, saliva and other bodily secretions) keep the viruses circulating as they evolve. The current series of outbreaks began in 2003 in South-east Asia, where a dramatic increase in intensive poultry production is sometimes combined with poor hygiene and bio-security in small "backyard" enterprises. Domestic ducks are commonly turned out to feed in rice fields alongside wildfowl during the day, and confined with other poultry at night, and birds from different areas are brought together in networks of poultry markets.

***Do migrating wild birds carry H5N1 from country to country?***

There is no concrete evidence that migratory birds have helped transmit the disease between countries or regions, but the possibility cannot be ruled out.

The spread of H5N1 within and beyond South-east Asia appears attributable to movements of infected poultry. The patterns of spread are not consistent with the timing and direction of movements of wild birds.

However, recent outbreaks in Europe have occurred along migratory flyways (including the Danube delta, a great gathering place for migratory waterfowl) during the autumn migration.

At present H5N1 has not been isolated from healthy wild birds, only those that were dead or dying. This suggests that it is highly lethal and that most infected birds would not be capable of migration.

Avian influenza viruses appear to survive best when temperatures fall below 20°C. Outbreaks that coincide with southward, autumn migration may represent resurgences of viral transmission in already affected areas as temperatures decline.

***How is the virus spread, if not by wild birds?***

There are several ways through which H5N1 might be transmitted, including movements of poultry (and feathers), migrating birds, the trade in wild-caught birds, and the movement of soil/mud on wheels and feet. The relative importance of each of these factors in the transmission of H5N1 is unknown, but to date, all outbreaks that have been

investigated have been traced back to poultry movements.

Within south-east Asia, movements of poultry and poultry products are known to have been involved in the virus's spread among flocks and between countries. Outbreaks in China, Kazakhstan and southern Russia are connected by major road and rail routes. The outbreaks in Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Russia occurred in summer, when most wild birds would be moulting and not undertaking long migrations. The involvement of wild birds in these outbreaks thus seems highly unlikely. The source of recent outbreaks in Europe is not known, but movements of poultry and poultry products provide as plausible an explanation as transmission by wild birds.

***Can people catch H5N1 from wild birds?***

There is no evidence that H5N1 infection in humans have been acquired from wild birds. Human infections have occurred in people who have been closely associated with poultry. Given the number and distribution of outbreaks in domestic poultry and waterfowl, the number of human cases is very small, indicating that the transmission of the virus from poultry to man remains inefficient.

***So why are there concerns for human health from H5N1?***

Although H5N1 can cause serious disease in people, the virus is hard to catch and so far does not seem to spread from person to person. The concern is that it might evolve into a form that is transmitted easily between people.

In the last 100 years there have been four major pandemics of human influenza A, which killed many people around the world. It is thought that these deadly virus strains arose when bird flu and human influenza viruses came together, possibly in pigs, and reassorted their genetic material. Continued outbreaks of H5N1 increase the chances of this happening again.

***What wild bird species are affected by H5N1?***

Primarily ducks, geese and swans (Anseriformes), also gulls.

***Does H5N1 threaten endangered birds?***

The virus at present appears to be lethal to some species of wild birds, and its infection of

endangered species could be catastrophic. It is estimated that up to 10 % of the world population of Bar-headed Geese died at Lake Qinghai in China. The main risk to endangered birds will be to those whose small populations concentrate in areas where the virus has become established, especially in poultry that use the same water and food supplies.

There are a large number of globally-threatened waterbird species in South-east Asia and several in South-east Europe whose populations have already been reduced by habitat loss and over-hunting, for which H5N1 could pose an additional risk to their future.

***Should I stop feeding the birds this winter? What about hunting, pigeon racing and fancy bird shows?***

At present there is no reason to stop feeding garden birds. The birds that visit feeders and bird tables are most unlikely to carry the H5N1 virus.

However, if the H5N1 virus changes in a way that dramatically increases its host range to include passerines (sparrows, tits, thrushes, finches etc), pigeons and game birds, then activities such as garden bird feeding, pigeon shows and racing, and game rearing and release will need to be evaluated, to maintain a clear separation from poultry.

***Should wild birds be culled to stop the disease spreading?***

Evidence for the involvement of wild birds in spreading the disease is weak. Even if wild birds were found to be playing a major part in spreading the H5N1 virus, attempts to exterminate entire bird populations - by shooting, poisoning, netting and trapping or even explosives - have hardly ever succeeded in eliminating a problem. In fact, such attempts could spread the virus more widely, as survivors disperse to new places, and healthy birds become stressed and more prone to infection.

Species that die from the virus are unlikely to carry the virus long distances, so the reservoir of infection is more likely to be a species showing few or no clinical signs, rather than the ones observed to be sick and dying. Without knowing which species are the reservoir, you cannot even begin to design a culling program.

Control of a wildlife disease through culling is likely only to be successful for diseases with low transmission rates that occur in one species, and where the outbreak is confined to a small area. None of these conditions are met with H5N1: a) avian influenza is highly infectious, b) multiple species are being infected, and c) the disease is spread across much of Central and South East Asia.

The World Health Organisation, Food and Agriculture Organisation and OIE (the World Organisation for Animal Health) agree that control of avian influenza in wild birds by culling is not feasible, and should not be attempted.

***Should wetlands be drained to deter waterbirds?***

Absolutely not. Apart from their extremely high conservation value, wetlands provide vital ecosystem services like flood control, water purification and nutrient recycling, and the livelihoods of many communities depend on them.

Draining wetlands is not only environmentally disastrous, but also likely to be counter-productive for the same reasons that culling is more likely to spread the Avian Influenza virus than control it. Birds will seek alternative staging places on their migration routes, and wildfowl forced to fly further and endure more crowded conditions along their migration route will become stressed and exhausted, and more prone to infection.

***So what should be done to prevent the spread of H5N1?***

The key steps are to improve bio-security. In the first instance, this means keeping wild birds apart from poultry, enhanced monitoring and control of poultry movements and markets, and swift culling of infected flocks. Countries currently free of the disease should consider a ban on imports of domestic poultry and wild birds for the pet trade from affected regions. Preventive measures should be focused especially on places where poultry, wild birds, and humans gather.

Online reference:

BirdLife International, 20 October 2005.

Available from

[http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/avian\\_flu/faq\\_bird\\_flu.html](http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/avian_flu/faq_bird_flu.html) [Accesses 30 October 2005]

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### Other Avian Influenza Website Links

World health Organisation

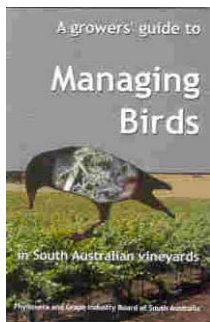
[http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian\\_influenza/en/](http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/)

Wildlife Conservancy Society

<http://www.wcs.org/>

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### Book Review - Managing Birds



In August 2005, the Phylloxera & Grape Industry Board of South Australia released a small book called 'A growers' guide to managing birds in South Australian vineyards' (87 pages, many coloured photographs). Content is acknowledged to Ron Sinclair from the Animal & Plant Control group Department of Water, Land & Biodiversity Conservation.

The book is in 4 sections

- risk assessment
- options for management
- best practice guidelines
- bird identification and information

It provides clear, straightforward descriptions of the four main options for managing pest birds in vineyards, as well as a detailed description of how to assess bird damage in a vineyard and determine the most cost-effective option for management (shooting is not recommended).

The book costs \$22 plus postage and handling (free to registered SA grape growers) and is available from the Phylloxera & Grape Industries Board SA  
46 Nelson Street, Stepney, SA 5069 ph (08) 8362 0488

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### An Interesting Observation

This Spring we had a magpie nest and a noisy miner nest 2 metres (6 feet) apart in a short gum tree. There was no aggression or interference shown between these two territorial species even though they were nesting so close together. The reason they both nested in such a small gum tree is because all the large trees had been cut down for the "urban consolidation" type of

development and the birds had nowhere else to nest.

I also think the adult male was looking after two nests, the young female having built her nest in the small gum tree. Her young nestling died and she started feeding a much bigger baby from another nest.

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### Seabird Rehabilitation Centre

The Wildlife Welfare Organisation opened their state of the art Hindmarsh Island Seabird Rehabilitation Centre on Monday 17th October 2005. The purpose built centre, the first of its kind in South Australia is located at Narnu Farm and is specially built for seabirds like pelicans, giant petrels and terns. The centre includes a treatment area, dry and wet rehabilitation areas and overhead watering systems.

Help for the construction of the centre came from Alexandrina Council, Victor Harbor Council, Goolwa Lions Club, Victor Harbor Rotary Club, and Assured Insurance, John and Sarah Hirsch and their parents of Narnu Farm and Andrew Chapman of the Marina Hindmarsh Island. Without the support of everyone especially Wildlife Rescue CEO Rena Robinson the centre would have remained a dream.

The centre is endorsed by the Department for Environment and Heritage and has the appropriate permits to keep and rehabilitate the seabirds.

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### Rescued Ravens



In late July, I was witness to a pretty horrific experience with the felling of trees at Mitcham Shopping Centre, in preparation for building the new shopping centre and cinemas included. Although they are an unprotected species, one of the trees felled contained a magnificent nest, about 1 metre in diameter,



of three baby ravens. The contractors left them out in the elements for the whole day and it wasn't until later they remembered there was a pet shop in the centre and the nest was taken to the shop. Luckily for the ravens, they were picked up by a rescuer within the hour.

The corvids (crows and ravens) are in the same family as magpies and jackdaws. I would have to agree with the statement that the corvids are the most intelligent of all the birds (remember the New Caledonian Crow stories), with the capacity to problem solve, concept form and relation match. And they have incredible memory.

The carer of the three raven babies has had a busy time and will keep me updated on their progress. During the day, they go into a large aviary for exercise and at night, come inside to watch the TV. Already they weigh over 500 grams and it's amusing to hear them "caw caw" so closely. The babies have magnificent blue eyes which go white as they age.

Allison Milnes

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### Warts in Magpies

Following up on my article in the last BCCS magazine, the warty growths on the bottom of the captive magpie's feet proved very difficult to cure completely. All 4 magpies in the aviary caught the virus and had to be treated with the human wart preparation. The perches in the aviary were scrubbed down with iodine every week. The magpies became very shy of being caught for treatment and the cure was a long process taking over 2 months to eradicate the warty growths. The wart treatment was painted on every second day and forms a white burn scar tissue which itself is probably painful for the bird. Calendula cream was also rubbed into the birds legs and feet. It may be a good idea to bathe the bird's feet in iodine too and to isolate a bird when it first shows warty growths. Any other suggestion for treating these warts would be appreciated

Rena Robinson  
(Wildlife Welfare and BCCS member)

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### Feather Chewing in Galahs

I was recently involved in several cases of severe feather chewing in adult galahs where

the galahs had denuded large areas of their body by chewing off their feathers.

I visited Ian Hough (veterinarian) for advice. Dr Hough describes feather chewing as a psychological problem for which there is an answer and a process to follow to redeem these birds. And most birds are redeemable. Feather chewing is an obsessive compulsive disorder which has to be broken.

Galahs and cockatoos are very intelligent birds and when taken as pets readily convert to the ways of humans and develop a dependence on them. Unfortunately as the bird gets older they receive less human involvement for many reasons

The feather chewing syndrome may be quite acute and come on suddenly. Dr Hough has a two page handout to help owners with these disturbed birds, describing many remedial steps that can be followed. These steps include

- changing the birds environment
- spending quality time with the bird
- changes in diet
- supplying toys of various types
- iodine supplements
- and realise that big beaked birds don't necessarily eat big seed - smaller seed can keep them more occupied for longer periods of time.

I have been looking after a galah called Billy for about a month now. Billy came to me with no feathers on his body. He has now regrown all the feathers on his legs and back and the constant psychotic movements have stopped. Because he is kept so busy he is distracted from his obsessive compulsive behaviour.

Rena Robinson  
(Wildlife Welfare and BCCS member)

If you would like learn more about treating these birds contact Rena ph 8555 5007.



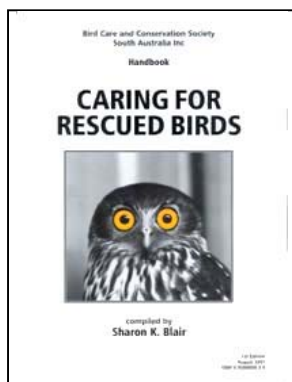
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