

An Inland Record of the Pacific Baza at Tibooburra, Far North-western New South Wales

ROBERT GREEN¹, RAYMOND TURNBULL² and DAVID M. WATSON³

¹P.O. Box 3211, Mount Gambier, South Australia 5290 (Email: shriketit@bigpond.com)

²P.O. Box 43, Bombala, New South Wales 2632

³Institute for Land, Water and Society, Charles Sturt University, Albury, New South Wales 2640

Summary

This note details an immature Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* observed at Tibooburra, in north-western New South Wales, in July 2005. This bird was in atypically arid habitat 700 km west of the nearest likely breeding population in southern Queensland.

Introduction

On 7 July 2005 a single immature Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* was seen in Tibooburra, far north-western New South Wales (NSW). This record is well outside the normal range of this species, and a description of the bird, its interaction with other birds, and a discussion on previous inland records of the species follow. The case has been accepted by the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (Case 405: acceptance date 16 February 2006).

The sighting

At 0840 h on 7 July 2005 a large accipiter-like raptor was briefly glimpsed as it dived into treetops opposite TJ's Roadhouse in Tibooburra, NSW (29°26'S, 142°01'E). A pair of Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* was then seen repeatedly dive-bombing the treetops; on investigation the first impression was of a bird similar in size to a female Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*. The first views were partially obscured by foliage, but the yellow eye was clearly visible. After we moved into a better position, a clear view was obtained (at a distance of ~ 40 m), and an immature Pacific Baza was identified. The bird continued to be harassed by Magpies and moved around in the canopy, only moving a few metres at a time. The bird was observed for ~ 6 minutes by DMW, RG, RT, Martin Asmus and four other people, with most views being clear and unobscured at a range of 20–35 m. Photographs were taken by DMW at this time.

The bird was observed later in the morning by John Rawsthorne and Errol Nye, during which time photographs were taken of the bird in the trees opposite TJ's Roadhouse as well as in flight and perched on powerlines. The bird was at that time being harassed by Yellow-throated Miners *Manorina flavigula* and Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* as it flew out over the town.

Just after midday on the same day, we searched the trees surrounding the small dam where the bird had been seen earlier, without success. Our attention was drawn by loud calls from Australian Ravens and Yellow-throated Miners over the town: on investigation, the Baza was seen flying low over the buildings with



The dam and surrounding trees where the Pacific Baza was seen at Tibooburra, NSW, in July 2005

Plate 7

Photo: Robert Green

several birds in pursuit constantly harassing it. The raptor flew out over the road and directly overhead of both RG and DMW, allowing unobstructed views of the ventral side of the bird from a distance of 10–15 m. It then returned to the small group of tall eucalypts surrounding the dam (Plate 7 shows the area in which the bird was mainly seen.)

Further observations were precluded by rainfall that evening, which led to the roads being closed for 3 days. As soon as we were able to return to Tibooburra, we searched for the bird but without success.

Description

The bird was similar in size to a female Brown Goshawk. The crest was clearly seen and was held for most of the time in a somewhat horizontal position (not erect). The yellow iris was clearly seen; the head was mostly grey but had patches of brown as well as a small pale spot immediately anterior to the crest. The throat and nape were buffy-brown, giving the appearance of a collar, and this colour extended up the nape to the base of the crest. The buffy-brown throat/upper breast was separated from the breast striping by an indistinct dark line. Frontal views showed bold barring on the lower breast, belly and flank regions; this barring was incomplete and patchy, particularly down the centre of the breast. The vent and lower flanks were rufous; the tail was shorter than in the Brown Goshawk, with a grey dorsal surface, narrow barring and an indistinct darker terminal band. When viewed from the front, the bird was splaying its wings slightly away from the body, revealing the underwing with barring visible on the remiges. There was nothing to

Table 1

Additional westerly sightings of the Pacific Baza *Aviceda subcristata* compiled from Birding NSW (1) and Birds Australia (2) atlas data. NP = National Park.

Year	Month	No.	Location	State	Co-ordinates	Source
1981	Feb.	1	*Curban (near Gilgandra)	NSW	31°33'S, 148°36'E	1
1981	Mar.	1	6 km N of Gilgandra	NSW	31°43'S, 148°39'E	1
1994	Nov.	2	Arrawatta Creek, Emmaville	NSW	29°20'S, 151°33'E	1
1996	Mar.	4	Kenebri	NSW	30°47'S, 149°01'E	1
1999	July	1	Tamworth	NSW	31°05'S, 150°50'E	1
2000	Aug.	1	Tamworth	NSW	31°14'S, 151°02'E	1
2001	Aug.	1	Tamworth	NSW	31°14'S, 151°02'E	1
2001	Sept.	n/a	Currawinya NP	Qld	28°41'S, 144°46'E	2
2001	Oct.	1	17 km S of Tamworth	NSW	31°15'S, 150°55'E	1
2001	Nov.	1	Barraba	NSW	30°17'S, 150°47'E	1
2002	Mar.	1	Kenebri	NSW	30°47'S, 149°01'E	1
2002	June	1	Tamworth	NSW	31°14'S, 151°02'E	1
2002	July	n/a	Golf course	Qld	28°06'S, 145°41'E	2
2002	July	n/a	Mitchell–St George Rd	Qld	26°35'S, 148°01'E	2
2002	Sept.	1	Tamworth	NSW	31°14'S, 151°02'E	1
2003	Sept.	1	Terridgerie Lagoon, Baradine	NSW	30°53'S, 148°59'E	1
2004		1	Terridgerie Lagoon, Baradine	NSW	30°53'S, 148°59'E	1

*Farthest west sighting previously in NSW

suggest that this bird was of captive origin: it kept moving around in the canopy, appeared shy and was constantly trying to avoid humans, and there was no apparent damage or wear to the tips of the primaries or rectrices.

Discussion

The Pacific Baza is a bird of forest, woodland and urban trees in the tropics and subtropics (Debus 1998). In Australia it occurs in a coastal band from the Kimberley in northern Western Australia to the central coast of NSW, occasionally south of Sydney. It is largely restricted to within about 400 km of the coast, in the east occurring inland to the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range and adjoining plains (Debus 1998). The bird at Tibooburra was ~ 1100 km from the eastern coast.

Ley (1990) recorded breeding of this species about 10 km north of Coolatai in northern NSW, and regarded that as approaching the Baza's western limit, but a record from Currawinya National Park in southern Queensland (Table 1) is farther west, only about 2.5 degrees (~ 250 km) east of Tibooburra. Records from Birding NSW (Table 1) show the most westerly records in NSW as being at Baradine and Gilgandra, but still a long way (~ 700 km) east of Tibooburra. Similarly, an additional western record (at 29°15'S, 149°15'E) shown by Cooper & McAllan (1995) falls between Moree and Mungindi. A record for early October at Thallon in southern Queensland (Jones 1986), over the border from Mungindi (28°59'S, 149°00'E), was of an adult pair and a third adult performing an undulating display

(S. Debus pers. comm.), suggesting the likelihood of breeding at least that far west at that latitude. Therefore, an immature Baza at Tibooburra may represent dispersal within 700 km of the nearest breeding population in eastern Australia.

Acknowledgements

We thank Alan Morris (Birding NSW) for supplying records and information, Andrew Silcocks (Birds Australia) for the use of atlas data of westerly records of the Baza, Keith Brandwood and the NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee for their input, and all participants on the Sturt National Park trip of 2005. Thanks also to Stephen Debus for additional records and constructive comments on a draft of this paper, and Greg Czechura for critical review.

References

- Cooper, R.M. & McAllan, I.A.W. (1995), *The Birds of Western New South Wales: A Preliminary Atlas*, NSW Bird Atlassers Inc., Albury.
- Debus, S.J.S. (1998), *The Birds of Prey of Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Jones, D. (1986), 'A survey of the bird community of "Bullamon Plains", Thallon, southern Queensland. RAOU 1985 campout', *Sunbird* **16**, 1-11.
- Ley, A.J. (1990), 'Two breeding records of the Pacific Baza in inland New South Wales', *Australian Bird Watcher* **13**, 258-259.

Received 19 August 2006



New Editorial Board Members

We welcome Dr Rohan Clarke and Dr Berry Kentish to the *AFO* Editorial Board. Rohan has a PhD in zoology and conservation biology, on the Black-eared Miner. His professional interests are in conservation biology and landscape ecology, with current research on the habitat requirements of threatened mallee birds at a landscape scale. He is a research fellow at Deakin University, investigating birds as indicators of the biodiversity benefits of revegetation in agricultural lands. He is also a keen recreational birder. Barry has an MSc and a doctorate in education. He is an academic associate in environmental management at the University of Ballarat, where he lectured in wildlife ecology until 2005, and is now pursuing interests in environmental volunteer work. His ornithological interests include the problem of superabundant species, such as gulls, ibis and cockatoos and their relations with people, and also bird song and its measurement.