Given that this is, in fact, the case, then perhaps it is not surprising that we found close affinity between DNA extracted from this specimen and from authentic samples of *C. hochstetteri.* Under these circumstances we feel that it is incumbent upon us to withdraw our suggestion above. However, the data of Boon *et al.* (2001) do still lead to the convincing separation of Reischeck's parakeet distinct from all other red-crowned parakeet types. This observation should now be taken to support the retention of the taxonomic name *C. hochstetteri*. The status of the Macquarie island parakeet remains, for the present, unresolved, indeed unexamined, by molecular methods and the taxonomic name of *C. erythrotis* should be conserved for reasons of continuity as advocated by Scofield (2001). Further we agree with him that this should serve as an object lesson in the need for caution when labelling museum specimens, or when interpreting existing labels.

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Keywords *Cyanoramphus erythrotis*; *Cyanoramphus hochstetteri*; Macquarie Island; Antipodes Island; mitochondrial DNA; phylogeny

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SHORT NOTE

Lizard predation by North Island fernbird (*Bowdleria punctata vealeae*)

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On 20 December 2004 OB was photographing North Island fernbirds (*Bowdleria punctata vealeae*) at their nest on Matakohe (Limestone Island) in Whangarei Harbour. The nest was in tall buffalo grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) which had a dead shrub tangled amongst it. The birds were making visits every five minutes or so and stayed at the nest for about a minute each time. Close examination of a digital photograph taken at 0918 h clearly showed a copper skink (*Cyclodina aenea*) held in the beak of one of the birds. The copper skink is the only lizard species present on the island (RP unpubl. data). Four other photographs showed the birds taking spiders, probably *Dolomedes minor* (K. Parker pers. comm.), to the nest.

Heather & Robertson (1996) list food items of fernbirds as mainly invertebrates, especially caterpillars, spiders, grubs, beetles, flies and moths. Studies of fernbirds which identified their food

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items include Best (1973) on the Snares Islands fernbird (*B. p. caudata*), Elliot (1978), Barlow & Moeed (1980) and Harris (1987) on the South Island fernbird (*B. p. punctata*), and Parker (2002) on the North Island fernbird. In all of the studies fernbirds fed almost exclusively on invertebrates with only two or three records of seeds and berries, and none of vertebrate prey. Best (1973) reported that larger prey items was fed to fernbird nestlings when they reached full weight at *c.* 12 – 16 days. Therefore, it is likely the chicks being fed in this instance were chicks approaching the fledgling stage. Whitaker & Thomas (1989) listed at least 23 bird species preying upon lizards in New Zealand but did not include fernbird. Hence, this appears to be the first record of fernbirds taking lizards.

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Keywords North Island fernbird; *Bowdleria punctata*; food

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REVIEW

Herons, egrets and bitterns. Their biology and conservation in Australia

Neil McKilligan

Australian Natural History Series, CSIRO Publishing, 2005.
ISBN 0643091335. AU $34.95

This is the first book to deal exclusively with the Australian members of the Family Ardeidae (collectively, the herons, egrets and bitterns). The work is produced in paperback with 20 colour photographs, 24 illustrations, 144 pages and a bibliography, representing a comprehensive treatment of the family in Australia. Of course, if you still want really detailed information on the ecology of herons of Australasia there is no substitute for HANZAB, *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic birds*. However, the detail and language of the Handbook renders information on herons somewhat inaccessible to the general public and students. McKilligan's book bridges this gap admirably and adds more general overviews about the heron family. It is a very easy-to-read book with accounts of the significance, origins and biogeography of herons, their taxonomic relationships and classification, and a wide range of aspects of their biology. There are plenty of intriguing facts. Did you know that an adult male Australasian bittern can weigh more that a great egret? Importantly, the huge breadth of topics dealt with got me thinking of a wide range of questions and issues I wanted to follow up on and the reference list is comprehensive enough to lead the reader to more information.

It is clear from this book that Neil McKilligan has a passion for herons. He has spent over 30 years studying egrets in Australia, and currently holds an honorary senior lectureship at the University of Southern Queensland. He writes the book to help redress the dearth of works that focus on families of Australian birds with the aim of reaching a general readership; all those interested in Australian natural history, amateur and professional ornithologists and secondary level and undergraduate students. When reading this book I developed a view of the importance of healthy wetlands generally and a sense of the vastness and variety of the Australian continent, which went beyond the immediate relevance to herons.

The heron fauna of Australia is clearly put in context with the rest of the world with introductory chapters on their basic morphology, distribution, movements and longevity, feeding and food, breeding, population dynamics and conservation. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on breeding, which included details of behaviour and displays as well as the requisite statistics on productivity and breeding success. There is some guidance on the different types of heron (day and night herons, egrets and bitterns) and on field identification and that vexing problem of estimating the size of a solitary 'white' heron. Inclusion of chapters on "What makes herons different" and "The importance of herons" that address not only the utilitarian views of herons, but their "contribution to the quality of human lives" add a dimension absent from similar styled books. There are clear text boxes that include explanations of topics such as taxonomy, wing aerodynamics, feather structure and marking and tracking.