

Preface

Because my father was a railwayman, I spent my childhood in country towns in New South Wales, and it was during the immediate post-war years, from the mid 1940s to the early 1950s, while resident at Dubbo in central-western New South Wales, that my lifelong interest in birds developed. I now look back on those years with very fond memories, for I was able to spend much of my time 'in the bush' looking at birds. Crested Bronzewings *Ocyphaps lophotes* are among birds that I associate with those years. Known locally, though inappropriately, as 'Topknot Pigeons', they nested in the large pepper tree *Schinus molle* in our backyard and came each day to feed in our fowl pen. At that time, I knew them only as inland birds, and in the region they rarely were seen east of Wellington. Also recalled from those early years are introduced Spotted Turtledoves *Streptopelia chinensis*, which I associate with holiday visits to Sydney. I retain a strong attraction to both species.

In the mid 1950s, I finished my schooling near Lismore, on the far north coast of New South Wales, which at that time was indeed 'pigeon country' and was where Harry Frith developed his strong interest in these birds. I well recall White-headed Pigeons *Columba leucomela* coming to feed in palm trees growing along the front driveway to the school and Brown Cuckoo-Doves *Macropygia amboinensis* feeding and nesting in shrubby regrowth on banks of the Wilsons River bordering the sportsfields. Nearby, I could always observe highly colourful Rose-crowned Fruit-Doves *Ptilinopus regina* in a stand of riverside rainforest, and I strongly suspect that it was the same place where, in about an hour, Harry Frith watched more than 60 of these fruit-doves fly into a large fig tree.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, I was a member of the technical staff at the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research, Canberra, when Harry Frith, then Chief of the Division, was undertaking his pioneering research on Australian pigeons and doves. Watching this research 'from the sidelines' strengthened my interest in these birds and my field observations became increasingly focused on them. In the 1970s and 1980s, as an officer of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, I regularly worked on Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory, so was able to undertake extensive field observations on species occurring at these localities. On Christmas Island, the Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon *Ducula whartoni* and the endemic form of the Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* were of particular interest,

because both were poorly known at that time. Meanwhile, William Cooper was compiling much valuable information on the habits of species frequenting the environs of his home on the Atherton Tableland, north Queensland, and it was the combination of our field experiences that prompted us to produce this book, with the primary objective of looking at new information that has become available or changes that have taken place during the more than 30 years since publication of Harry Frith's *Pigeons and Doves of Australia*.

Pigeons and Doves of Australia was the first book to deal exclusively with Australian species, and its importance is reflected in the numerous references that I make to it in this volume. In its pages, Harry Frith presented the findings of research that he and colleagues at the CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research had undertaken, involving both field investigations and behavioural studies of captive birds, so that for the first time we had a comprehensive account of the biology of Australian columbids. In the present work, I have attempted to update that account, and have expanded the coverage by including information on the Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon and island populations of the Emerald Dove, together with what little historical data we have on extinct forms from Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands. Also, I have documented recent occurrences of additional species in Australia, either as vagrants or possible colonisers. Contributing most importantly to the technical content of this book, and especially to its visual attractiveness, are the superb colour illustrations by William Cooper portraying all species in their natural habitats together with drawings or field sketches depicting identifying or behavioural features.

Plan of the book

This book has been planned as a reference work and the text has been set out so that information can be located quickly. Consequently, all information pertaining to a species is included in the appropriate sections of text on that species, even though some habits may be similar to those of another species. I am firmly of the opinion that in a reference work some repetition is more desirable than forcing the reader to search back and forth in an attempt to find the required information. The use of headings and subheadings in the text is intended to further aid the speedy location of information.