



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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Quarterly Newsletter of the W.A. Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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## SNIPE SNEAK INTO SOUTH OF STATE

The genus *Gallinago* comprises the true snipe (not to be confused with Painted Snipe) and has seven species all of which breed only in the northern hemisphere. Three of these have been recorded in Australia: Latham's Snipe *G. hardwickii*, (eastern Australia), Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* (northern Australia including the Kimberley) and Pin-tailed Snipe *G. stenura* (Pilbara).

Unfortunately, the *Gallinago* snipe are all remarkably similar in appearance. The three species occurring in Australia are particularly difficult to distinguish in the field and most observers should not attempt identification to species level. Identity largely rests on number, shape and patterns of tail feathers, although subtle differences in size and wing patterns and general habitat preferences may be useful. To further add to the confusion, the Common Snipe *G. gallinago* should not be ignored as it could easily occur in Australia, being fairly common in parts of Southern Asia.

Prior to 1984, there had been no records of *Gallinago* snipe in the South-West. In fact the nearest localities for snipe were the northern Pilbara coast (specimens of Pin-tailed) and at least one isolated occurrence of a *Gallinago* snipe in the Gascoyne basin. Observers familiar with snipe have been looking out for these birds in apparently suitable South-West freshwater marshes for many years. Suitable habitat can in fact vary from rank grassland to sparsely vegetated mud flat or lush floating plant rafts!

On Sunday 29 January 1984, a number of RAOU observers (Watkins, Parish *et al*) had repeated views of a *Gallinago* snipe at Lake Seppings in Albany. The bird was flushed from pockets of shore with a little mud adjacent to grass and reeds and it flew in typical strong, weaving snipe-like style. It was seen by other observers on the two following days. Little could be said to identify the bird other than that it had the proportionately long bill and small, squat body of *Gallinago* snipe. One sharp raspy call was heard by R. Jaensch who thought that the call was not typical of Latham's Snipe.

Another snipe was flushed from collapsed beds of rush *Baumea articulata* at McLarty Lake near Coolup on 12 February 1984. The rapidly drying lake had exposed mud flats near the reeds which still enclosed some water and sloppy mud. During the RAOU excursion on 18 February, this bird was again observed in the same habitat area.

No specific identity could be given to the McLarty bird. However it was thought that it was smaller than a Latham's Snipe and that calls were somehow different. The question of identity will probably not be solved until a bird is inspected in the hand.

Although we might expect Pin-tailed Snipe to sometimes wander further south than the North-West (especially if cyclones are in effect), we cannot discount Latham's Snipe or other *Gallinago* species. The eastern rather than northern subspecies of the Masked Lapwing occurs occasionally in the South-West, so movement of birds between the SE and SW corners of Australia is certainly feasible.

Colonization of the South-West by snipe could be a long-term consequence of land clearance in the South-West. Paddocks with winter and spring marshes have now replaced paperbark swamps and wet heathland which would not have been suitable for snipe. Furthermore, grazing by stock, clearing and reduced water levels because of drainage and diversion of water have converted heavily-vegetated wetlands to more open swamps suitable for snipe to feed and shelter in.



No, this is not a snipe, but an Asian Dowitcher, captured by the North-West Wader Expedition in November 1983! Although snipe and dowitchers have rather similar bills, snipe inhabit freshwater swamps while dowitchers feed on coastal mudflats. The Asian Dowitcher is one of the rarest waders in the world and this is the first photograph to be published of this species 'in the hand'.

PHOTO BY DUNCAN PARISH

## A BASE FOR THE W.A. GROUP

With the rapidly increasing membership and additional responsibilities of the W.A. Group of the RAOU, it has become necessary to establish a 'permanent' base in Perth. The previous arrangement of the W.A. Group sharing the facilities of the Waterbird Project Office in the Field Officer's spare bedroom had become untenable!

Since Monday 13 February, the RAOU has occupied premises at —

Suite 30, Rowleys Centre  
15 Ogilvie Road (South)  
Canning Bridge W.A. 6153  
Phone (09) 364 6202

The Office is quite spacious, modern, air-conditioned (!), well lit and convenient to undercover, street and vacant-lot parking and it even affords occasional views of passing cormorants and pelicans! The cost of renting the room is \$42 per week plus rates and there should be ample room for the Waterbirds Field Officer, his Assistant, the Ground Parrot Officer and occasionally the RAOU Director, Stephen Davies.

Members are encouraged to call and see RAOU staff whenever necessary. The Ogilvie Road turnoff is on the left immediately in front of the pedestrian overpass after crossing Canning Bridge from Perth and the office is on the first level in the new part of the Rowleys Centre complex. Visitors from Fremantle should turn right at Sleat Road, take the first left and then left again into Ogilvie Road.

## COMING EVENTS CALENDAR 1984

- Mar. 10—Local excursion, Bibra & Yangebup Lakes.
- Mar. 26—Meeting, U.W.A., Peter Curry: Muttonbirds.
- Mar. 30—Apr. 1—CAMPOUT, Wellington Mills.
- Apr. 8—Day Trip, Mandurah — Coodanup — Serpentine R.
- May 5—Local excursion, Neerabup Nat. Park.
- May 7—Meeting, U.W.A., Review of recent RAOU activities.
- June 9—Day Trip, Guraga & Wannamal Lakes.
- June 25—Meeting, U.W.A., Mike Brooker.
- Aug. 6—Meeting, U.W.A., Plans for 1984-5 activities.

## COMING MEETINGS

From February 1984, meetings will be held in **Lecture Room 1** in the **Mathematics Department** at the University of Western Australia. Access is via Entrance No. 3 off Fairway and parking may be available on Fairway or in the University grounds near Entrances 3 and 4. Lecture Room 1 faces the Weatherburn Lecture Theatre, which is part of the Mathematics Department's buildings closest to the tall Regional Computing Centre. Look for the RAOU signs (see also the sketch map below).

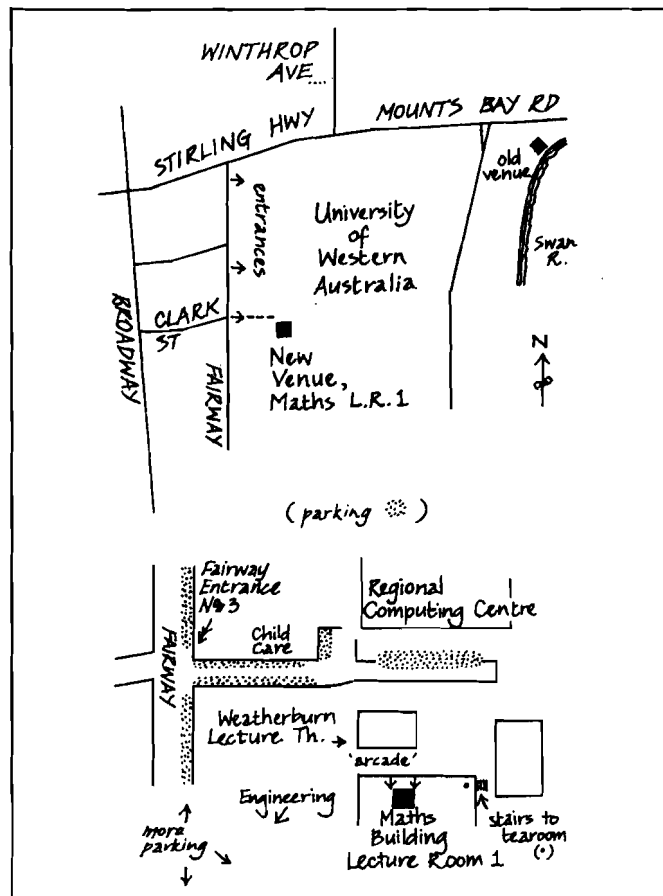
Meetings commence at 8.00 p.m. and include tea and biscuits afterwards. Visitors are especially welcome.

### Monday, March 26: Peter Curry — Muttonbirds

Are you aware of the incredible life history of the Short-tailed Shearwater, reputed to be one of the world's most numerous migrants? Peter Curry will tell us about Dom Serventy's comprehensive study of these birds at our regular March meeting.

### Monday, May 7: 'What we've discovered in the past 12 months'

The Meetings Sub-Committee of the W.A. Group has recommended that the Group should hold six meetings each year: three with invited speakers and three based on discussion of activities of the RAOU in W.A. On May 7, our first study/discussion meeting will be held, with illustrated reports from bird study projects in W.A. These will include Doug Watkins/Mike Bamford on **wader banding** and counting, Steve Keeling on **Reed Warbler** trapping, Shapelle McNee on **waterbird counting** and possibly some surprise speakers! We hope to close the main part of the meeting by about 9.30 so that members can **mix and chat** longer over tea and biscuits.



### Monday, June 25: Mike Brooker

Mike has joined the CSIRO Rangelands and Wildlife research staff at Helena Valley this year. He has worked in the past with **Wedge-tailed Eagles** on the Nullarbor and more recently with waterbirds at the **Macquarie Marshes** in N.S.W. and **Kakadu National Park** in Arnhem Land. At this meeting Mike will speak about aspects of his work in one of these fields.

### Monday, August 6: 'What lies ahead'

Our second study/discussion meeting for the year will concentrate on projects and activities over the coming twelve months. The main subject will be **Ground Parrot** searches and **campouts** connected with that project.

## COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

Keep an eye on the 'Where to go' column in Friday's *West Australian* for impromptu excursions. Unless otherwise stated, these will start from the John Forrest Roundabout in Kings Park.

If further details of an event are needed, please feel free to ring the RAOU office from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on 364 6202.

### CAMPOUT — Friday, March 30 to Sunday, April 1: Wellington Mills

We have booked four Department of Youth Sport and Recreation chalets at Wellington Mills (via Dardanup, south-west of Collie, 192 km from Perth) for two nights: **Friday 30th and Saturday 31st March** and hope to look at local bush birds, as well as waterbirds on Leschenault Inlet.

- \* Cost is \$10 per person.
- \* Be self-sufficient for food (utensils, gas stoves, fridges provided.)
- \* Ten persons per chalets. Bring sleeping bag.
- \* Department Rules: sorry NO tents or campervans.  
sorry NO pets, no alcohol.
- \* Barbecues may be used. Swimming in river.

**Please book a place with Organiser Diane on 381 9035: send \$10 on or before 26 March.** No bookings or refunds will be arranged after this date.

Best time to ring: 5 p.m. - 8 p.m., weekdays.

Post cheques to D. Beckingham, 101 Park Street, Subiaco.

#### **Sunday, April 8: Mandurah — Coodanup — Serpentine R.**

Meet at 0800 on the side of the bitumen road to Coodanup (Coodanup is on the shores of Peel Inlet), just south of where it leaves the main Pinjarra — Mandurah Road. Look for the Coodanup sign on your right, soon after Mandurah, if travelling from Perth to Pinjarra via the Rockingham Road. Probable itinerary: Creery Island area (*Little Egrets*, *Regent Parrots*); Serpentine River wetlands (a new area for RAOU excursions); Mandurah Seawall (*Roseate Terns*). Full day; total return distance from Perth G.P.O. approximately 180 km.

#### **Saturday, May 5: Neerabup National Park and swamps near the Yanchep Road**

Meet near the intersection of Scenic Drive and Ariti Avenue in Wanneroo (beside Joondalup L.) at 0900. We will endeavour to compile a bird list for parts of Neerabup National Park and may augment this with looks at small reed swamps near the Yanchep Road.

#### **Saturday, June 9: Guraga and Wannamal**

Meet at 0900 at the Chittering Store, between Muchea and Bindoon on the Great Northern Highway (65 km from Perth G.P.O.). We will proceed to look for Freckled Ducks at Chittering and Wannamal Lakes; later moving to the elusive but worthwhile Guraga Lake if we have enough 4WD vehicles (or Kingswoods)! Full day trip with return distance of approximately 350 km from G.P.O. Contact RAOU office if transport is needed.

The RAOU is looking for a suitable venue for a campout in the Northcliffe area. Anyone knowing of a property or contact person can write to or ring the RAOU office in Canning Bridge. We are interested in visiting in the Spring of 1984 and would require space for approximately 20 car-loads of campers.

The June Newsletter should give details of all campouts and excursions up to 31 December 1984.

## **MEETING REPORTS**

#### **Special Meeting No.2, 28 November 1983: Bert & Babs Wells "Let's Go Wild"**

The tremendous popularity of recent meetings has continued: at least 100 people attended the November 28 presentation by Bert and Babs Wells. A professionally-prepared audio-visual entitled "Let's Go Wild" took us through the times and travels of these two well-known natural history photographers.

Combining information, artistic expression and humour, Bert and Babs held their audience spell-bound with a great diversity of slides illustrating their equipment and the places they had been to. Of the numerous bird shots, some of the most enthralling were the high-speed flash shots of birds in flight.

#### **3 December 1983: Annual Social Night**

Thanks largely to the inspired organisation of Steven Keeling and Shapelle McNee, a flock of 140 members attended the enormously successful inaugural outdoor RAOU Social Night. Blessed by perfect evening weather and a pleasant lawn setting at W.A.I.T., those who gathered for the feast were treated to sumptuous fillet steak, lashings of bacon and onion and juicy fruit salad with cream (washed down with a selection of fine wines!).

Chit-chat was readily forthcoming as many members staggered to the event straight from the Bird Tally (see report elsewhere). Entertainment was provided by the antics of Keeling, Curry and crew announcing the bird species recorded in the Tally. Expensive prizes were awarded liberally: some were binoculars and paintings, others were bird posters.

All who came to the party went home satisfied with the fun, food and fellowship and we all look forward to the 1984 show!

#### **6 January 1984: AGM**

The Annual General Meeting had a very warm reception with about 40 people in attendance. The activities of the Group were reviewed and summarized by Stephen Davies. In summary the W.A. Group had a very successful year in 1983. Discussion from the floor was vigorous with topics such as involving more young people in the Group and the possibility of hiring a Mini-bus for some day or weekend excursions. The meeting closed at 9.20 p.m.

**Office-bearers for 1984** (as at February 29) are:

Chairman:	Dr. Stephen Davies
Vice-Chairman:	Ros Denny
Secretary:	Joan Seabrook
Treasurer:	Dan Drakes
Extra members:	Clive Napier, Brian Collins, Shapelle McNee, Bob Goodale and Jack Donohoe.

## **EXCURSION REPORTS**

#### **26 November 1983: Cooloongup Lake and Claypits**

A small but resolute band of observers gathered on this very hot day to look at waterbirds in the Baldvies area. Results were not overly inspiring at first but Doug Watkins guided the group to tuart woodland at the north end of Cooloongup Lake where Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters proved to be quite an exciting find (not often seen on the coastal plain). After a protracted visit to the delicatessen, the stayers looked at the RAOU-Alcoa Claypits Reserve, which now attracts a fair variety of cormorants, heron-types and ducks.

#### **2-3 December: Metropolitan 24-Hr Tally Hunt**

A diverse array of vehicle-loads of observers constituted no less than 21 teams of entrants for this pre- Annual Dinner/Barbecue special event.

The object was for each team to locate as many species as possible within the bounds of the Perth metropolitan region, between 1900 hrs on Friday evening and the same hour on Saturday, 3 December. Teams made their own choices of starting points, while everyone finished, at least we think they did, at the barbecue venue in Bentley.

During the course of a memorable day, teams repeatedly crossed tracks around favourite birding spots, sometimes being careful to contrive expressions of doom and despair and to mutter 'not much about today' on their way out from the place where they had just seen fifty or more species.

#### **The Results**

Not counting the valiant efforts of one family team, who had only the time to glance up occasionally as they ran around preparing the way for the beautiful barbecue that awaited us all, teams did extremely well. They chose a wide variety of bush locations to track down the dryland species and the most popular was actually Kings Park (wonder why??) which was visited by four teams. Among wetlands, Pelican Point was the most popular site for a flying visit, being visited by ten teams. Among others, Herdsman was visited by nine, Alfred Cove by seven, and Bibra, Forrestdale and Thomson lakes each by six teams.

Even the unluckiest crew managed 43 species. The average find was 77, and no less than seven teams noted 90 species or over the best three were as follows:

Team	Key localities visited	Species total
Stephen Ambrose	Penguin I., L. Cooloongup	96
David Doust	Wellard, Jarrahdale,	
Bob & Ann Goodale	Herdsman, L. Claremont	
Mandy Silberstein	North Mole.	
Perry & Alma de Rebeira	Two Rocks, Yanchep N.P.,	100
Geoff Shannon	Herdsman, L. Monger L.,	
Peter Southern	Pelican Point, John F. N.P.	

Norma Duff  
Peel Howden  
Bill & Karen McRoberts  
Duncan Parish

Bickley res., Alfred Cove  
Booragoon, Bibra,  
Yangebup, Thomson &  
Forrestdale Lakes,  
Rockingham, Pt. Peron

101

To find a hundred species in Perth on a day when the easterlies blew incessantly, keeping songs and calls down and making many bush-birds harder to find, is no mean feat. A prize for correctly guessing the **total number of species found by all teams combined, 161**, was just deserve to Ron van Delft for such inspired insight.

Highlights for various teams included Emu, Australasian and Little Bitterns, Reef Heron, Square-tailed Kite, Peregrine, Terek Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater and Rufous Songlark.

And the ones we all missed? There were quite a few. It's not difficult to explain why no one could find, for example, emu-wrens on a windy day, but where were all the White-fronted Chats?

Many thanks to all the many people who all enjoyed themselves no-end.

P.J. Curry

#### **10 December 1983: Canning River & Estuary**

Thirty persons holding binoculars arrived at Wilson Weir on 10 December 1983 at 8.00 a.m. Guided by Luke Pen, two small lakes were examined before the party walked upstream. After a refreshment stop, a smaller group went to Riverton bridge to look for crakes and rails — and Spotless Crakes were seen.

In all, 43 bird species were seen; a little disappointing, though a highlight was an Australian Hobby striking a Tree Martin (seen by one group) while another group saw the Hobby alight and devour its meal. A pleasant morning in a most interesting area, one more of Perth's astonishing bird watching locations in the midst of the city.

#### **14 January 1984: Forrestdale Lake**

The morning began cool and refreshing, enabling an enjoyable skulk through the reeds with the chance of discovering foraging crakes or waders, or even a close view of the many other water-birds on Forrestdale Lake.

Although the crakes made themselves scarce initially and waders were in low numbers, by 2.00 p.m. all efforts had been rewarded. Sightings of special interest included Baillon's and Spotless Crakes, a Black-tailed Native-hen, 15 Wood Sandpipers, a Black-tailed Godwit, an immature Red-kneed Dotterel and a Long-toed Stint.

Most of the waders seen on Lake Forrestdale were roosting or feeding on exposed mud at the south end of the Lake. These included Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, Red-capped Plovers and the one Long-toed Stint sighted. It was also at the south end that the crakes were seen foraging on the edge of the reeds. The reason for this may have been that more mud was exposed at the south end and there being less water in the reeds. The area of water was quite extensive for this time of year, providing excellent habitat for at least 35 waterbird species. Observers estimated that there were about 8,000 ducks on the lake!

It was an excursion full of surprises revealed to us by the assortment of telescopes brought by the 40 to 45 people attending.

#### **28 January 1984: Herdsman Lake**

A number of students from Dr. Stephen Davies' U.W.A. Extension Course on birds, swelled the numbers attending the excursion (many RAOU members were at Torbay). Some 44 bird species were noted, most of which were waterbirds. Great Crested Grebes were still feeding young: in fact all three grebe and all four cormorant species were recorded. Little Egrets and Yellow-billed Spoonbills were unusual sightings, the Red-kneed Dotterel and Wood Sandpiper being a little more usual.

Unfortunately, reports for the Torbay Campout and subsequent excursions have not yet been collated. These should appear in the June issue.

## FROM STEPHEN DAVIES

Many of you will now know that I am going to divide my time equally between Perth and Melbourne this year as the RAOU's first **Director**. The RAOU has grown to a point where it really needs someone to coordinate its activities if it is to maintain the momentum of bird study in Australia, built up by the Atlas and continued by your participation in our many projects. There are now **18 RAOU staff** at six localities round Australia. I have been associated with a lot of this expansion and it is a privilege to be able to take a direct hand in seeing that it continues. But it can only go on if members support the Union's aims.

**What does the RAOU aim to do?** Simply to improve the preservation and knowledge of our native birds. It has always said that in its constitution and, lately, spelled out in the front of every *Emu*. Recently, with financial support from outside the RAOU, we have undertaken many studies that fulfil these aims. They have been possible because the membership has participated and enjoyed participating. They have been financially supported because the studies have been made to meet rigorous scientific standards and the results have been published both in our own reports and in other scientific journals.

In the tasks that I am undertaking now I shall be trying to maintain that balance, enjoyable participation by members and critical planning, analysis and writing by coordinators of the projects. That partnership is convincing because it works. For example it has produced an Atlas that will give Australian ornithology a **new dimension**; a wader survey that has revealed **Australia's true importance** to the world's waders. These are well known but there are many other really exciting advances in knowledge that will help us to look after our birds better. In W.A. our own Waterbird project is a **model** not just for Australia but for many of our near neighbours as well. Roger will be talking about it internationally at the IUCN meeting in Groningen in May this year.

These advances in knowledge take a long time to translate into concrete acts of **preservation**. But without them we cannot make useful progress. Increasingly our breadth of knowledge about birds is adding weight to our opinions and with gratifying frequency **our opinion is now being sought** by governments and planners. Not only is it sometimes hard for members to see the overall progress we are making but it is hard for the RAOU staff to see where their bit fits in too. So it is my task to try to **communicate** these successes, and some of the difficulties, all through the network of people like you who are the fibre of Australian ornithology. Next newsletter I'll take just one of our RAOU projects and tell you where it is going.

## AT LAST THE ATLAS

The Atlas of Australian Birds will be published at the end of May 1984. **More than 300 birdwatchers collected 2,715,413 records** of birds between 1977 and 1981 to determine the distribution of Australia's birds. The Atlas is the result!

It has maps showing the distribution in 1° blocks of **645 species** and in 10' blocks of the 11 Tasmanian endemics. Another 102 uncommon and vagrant species are detailed in the text. Where the range of a species has changed greatly since European settlement, maps of its **historical distribution** are presented also. Each of the main species has a page devoted to it on which is the two-colour map, a black and white drawing of the bird and a **fully-referenced text**. The Field Atlas maps (1977-81) show grid blocks in which each species was reported and found breeding; different circle sizes show whether the bird was commonly or rarely reported in any grid block. The text discusses the range and movements of the species, where to find it and some factors governing its distribution.

During the Field Atlas a total of 885 1° blocks was visited of which 812 cover the continent of Australia and its main islands. The most widespread species was the Brown Falcon, reported in 769 1° blocks. The **most commonly reported** species differed from State to State. In Western Australia they were:

Willie Wagtail  
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike  
Australian Magpie

This and other information is included in the introduction of the Atlas.

In appreciation of the contribution made by birdwatchers and birdwatching organisations throughout Australia to the compilation of the Atlas, a pre-publication discount is available through the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. **The recommended retail price will be \$49. The cost to people ordering through the RAOU before 9 March 1984 is \$39 plus postage.** Only orders accompanied by payment can be accepted. Send yours to: RAOU, 21 Gladstone St., Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3039. Order forms are available from the RAOU office in Canning Bridge.

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY 1984

13-26 May

**Bird Banding and Bird Diets.** This will be a combined course, the section on Bird Diets being led by Dr. Mike Calver and the Bird Banding by Perry de Rebeira and Peter Congreve. During the course it is planned to spend some time in camp at Eucla or Mundrabilla to check the movement of birds east of Eyre. Dr. Mike Calver will demonstrate methods of sampling what the birds caught have been eating. The fees will be \$95.00 for one week of six nights or \$190.00 for the full thirteen nights. Persons under 16 will not be accepted.

26 August-  
1 September

**Botany.** Dr. Neville Marchant will lead this course, which will be a continuation of the course of July 1983 set in a different season. The enthusiastic support given by amateur botanists on that course did much to obtain the good collections of plants made. Their continued support is sought for this work.

2-8 September

**Reptiles.** The course which is the second on this subject will be led by Dr. Mike Bamford. The methods of catching reptiles in the field, their measurement in the hand and how to identify them and record them will be demonstrated. Our lizards are a fascinating section of the life in the mallee. Last January, during Mary Dyer's course 125 individuals were caught (belonging to eighteen species), measured and released.

16-29 September

**Field Ornithology.** this will be the fifth course on this subject. It will again be led by Dr. Stephen Davies assisted by the Warden. The course will include mist netting as a means of studying birds in the hand, census techniques and counting birds, nests and territories and the interpretation of data gathered. However, the subject matter may be changed to match the changing weather pattern at the time of the course.

28 October -  
3 November

**Shore Birds.** Petery Curry and the Warden. The influx of migratory waders to the beach near Eyre reaches a peak during the last week of October and the first week of November.

## WADER STUDY GROUP

The highlight of the wader study scene in W.A. over the past few months was the **November North-West Expedition**, which resulted in the banding and dyeing of over **3,500 waders of 24 species**, which included a first for Australia in the form of a Red-necked Phalarope. A number of recaptures were made, most of birds banded previously in the North-West, but one Curlew Sandpiper had been banded by our Russian counterparts, this being only the **second Russian recovery** in Australia (The first was a Red-necked Stint at Alfred Cove in 1980). Another interesting

record set on the expedition was the sighting of a **blue-dyed Curlew Sandpiper** at Port Hedland; one of the birds banded and dyed in Malaya/Singapore by **Interwader-'83** last August.

On the local wader front, monthly counts of many sites in the south-west have been continuing, with a special effort being made in February for the national summer count. When the monthly counts finish in June, we should have a clearer idea of wader movements over the year including the seasonal movements of the migratory species as well as internal movements. One such local movement which we have recorded is the appearance of **large numbers of Curlew Sandpipers on the Swan Estuary** in January and February. We don't quite know where they come from, but many were developing breeding plumage in early February, so we were probably thinking of heading north.

**Local banding activities** have not been as successful as our branding programme, partly because we loaned gear and personnel to the North-West Expedition, and missed out on a month of banding on the Estuary and nearby lakes, but also because of other commitments and the weather. **Strong sea-breezes** in the evenings have made netting at Pelican Point difficult, and lack of cooperation from the birds hasn't helped, but we are still getting birds banded, making valuable recaptures and coming to a clearer understanding on the complexities of ageing waders. The majority of recaptures made have been of birds **banded locally** in recent years, but one report just received was of a Curlew Sandpiper caught in Tasmania in November, 1983, which had been banded at Pelican Point in 1973.

Late in the season, arrangements were made to begin a **colour-banding** programme, specifically to look at movements between the Estuary and the lakes, such as Forrestdale, Yangebup, Thomsons and Coo loongup. This looks like it will not be fully underway until next season (yes, we are already thinking of next season), when a single colour band, either **white or mauve**, will be put on some wader species in addition to the usual metal band, but on the other leg. These colour bands should be quite visible from a distance, and will tell us where the birds were banded. Overseas banding groups have been informed, so some interesting information may result, as there is still very little data on wader movements into and out of Australia. The most recent international recovery of a bird banded by the WAWSG was of a Red-necked Stint banded near **Broome** on August 30, 1981, and caught at Dian Cheng, Guangdong, in the **People's Republic of China**, on December 22, 1983.

Although international recoveries may be few, our contact with overseas wader study groups is growing. Dr. Timothy Williams, of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, was here briefly in February, when he discussed his work on **tracking migratory birds using radar** with RAOU members. In May, Dr. Gerard Boere, the Chairman of the Dutch Wader Study Group, will be in Perth, and there should be opportunities to hear of the work being carried out in the **Netherlands** on waders.

As promised, Doug has moved and his new address is 466 Canning Highway, Attadale 6156 (phone 330 1038); messages can also be left at the new RAOU Office. **Enquiries** regarding monthly counts and late-season banding activities should be directed towards Mike (H: 367 3032. W: 332 2468). On the subject of Mike, I thank everyone for their concern over my now non-existent appendix and please, no more jokes about my weight! I'm eating as much as I can!

Mike Bamford

## BIRD REPORT: 1982, 1983 and 1984

Believe it or not, the 1982 report is now at the printers so it should be ready for distribution in the near future. **It will be sent to all members unless they inform me that they do not wish one.** Please pay on receipt of your copy as we do not have enough money to print it!

Work is now starting on the **1983 report** so could I please have your outstanding records **before the end of March**. When filling out the forms, the Atlas number is not essential but helpful, if you do not use the recognised names. Numbers do not need to be accurate but '1' or '2' or 'common' is better than a tick.

**Remarks** are voluntary but if your record is out of keeping with your previous experience of the area, please let me know as it

adds considerable value to the record. It is useful to know that the Blue-tongued Traddle-Lark you saw on New Year's Day is the first one there for 15 years, is very different from the same bird seen every day for the last 10 years, but your New Year's resolution to send in a record had only just started.

So please bear this in mind as you send in those 1983 records and think about the 1984 ones. There is a new edition of the *Travellers Atlas* of W.A., now available. It has some interesting new features and is a good buy.

Geoff Shannon  
15 Lagonda Drive, Gwelup 6021

## SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by R.A.O.U. Field Officer, Roger Jaensch.

### 1. Exposé: Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

The Long-toed Stint breeds across Siberia from the Ural Mountains to the far-north Pacific and spends the northern winter at sites across southern Asia from India to New Guinea as well as in Australia. Counts since 1981 by the Australasian Wader Study Group of the R.A.O.U. have only produced a known population of "less than 100" Long-toed Stints in Australia.

In Western Australia, Long-toed Stints were first recorded in 1966 in the Murchison region but have subsequently been recorded in most parts of the State. My own observations in the Pilbara suggest that it may occur in moderate numbers in the North-West (i.e. small parties scattered generally), while all current evidence points to the South-West as being the most important area for Long-toed Stints in Australia.

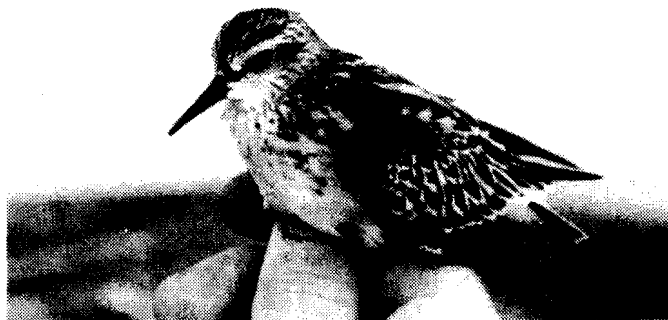
Although flocks of 20 to 30 often occur at three sites in southern S.A., Long-toed Stints rarely appear in such numbers in the far-eastern states. Concentrations in W.A. have reached 67 at Forrestdale Lake (22.2.81) and a similar number at Carnarvon on migration, while at least ten other southern sites regularly support from five to 25 birds.

Data from the Waterbird Project indicate that Long-toed Stints have used seven nature reserves since 1981, with a maximum of 26 birds at Forrestdale Lake in March, 1982. In addition, the 1984 A.W.S.G. Summer Count revealed 60 Long-toeds lurking in collapsed, boggy reedbeds at McLarty Lake near the Harvey Estuary. Other favoured non-reserve wetlands include Herdsman, Karakin and Yangebup Lakes (5 to 20 birds each).

The 1983 A.W.S.G. National Summer Count produced 40 Long-toed Stints, 65% of which were in the South-West. It would be reasonable to expect 150, or possibly more than 200 Long-toeds on the coastal plain in most summers.

Although Long-toed Stints sometimes occur in estuaries and at Saltfields, they seem to prefer fresh-water environments, particularly where stunted grass, reeds or other plant cover are available. They are typically shy, often deliberately seeking cover when landing, and 'erupting' from shelter at close range, surprising the observer who is unaware of their presence.

A detailed table highlighting points of identification for Long-toed Stints was given in *W.A. Bird Notes* No. 24. The most useful field characters are the Sharpie-like richly coloured upperparts and sweet, trilling calls.



A Long-toed Stint which was captured with mist-nets in Singapore. Note the heavily marked upperparts: Red-necked Stints only have rich upperparts if their throats are dark also (breeding plumage).

PHOTO BY DUNCAN PARISH

### 2. Glossy Ibises breeding at Chandala Lake

Patient detective work by George and Pam Agar, Grant Pearson and others has culminated in the discovery of two nests of the Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*, at Chandala Lake Nature Reserve. Most birds present at this magnificent **paperbark swamp** during spring and early summer apparently breed there. Therefore, regular use of the wetland by up to 11 Glossy Ibises has led observers to search carefully for active nests of this species.

The profusion of nesting Straw-necked Ibises and defecating young of various species has always been an **obstacle** to locating different nesting species at Chandala. However, in December 1983, nests with eggs and young of Glossy Ibises were located in the outer parts of a Chandala paperbark.

According to Waterbird Project data, Chandala is one of the **top breeding sites** for waterbirds in the South-West (16 species breeding) between July and January each year. As there appears to be **only one other breeding locality** recorded for Glossy Ibises in W.A. (in the Kimberley: Storr's List of Kimberley Birds), the Chandala site assumes even greater importance.

That a few pairs from a waterbird population of less than ten birds would nest in a mixed colony of a few thousand birds is quite interesting. However, both Sacred Ibises and Great Egrets have only five to ten nesting pairs at this site and Yellow-billed Spoonbills have presumably **built up** from a few pairs in the past to as many as 39 birds at present. Royal Spoonbills could well emulate this colonisation.

The most remarkable fact though, is that the **known South-West population** of Glossy Ibises is only **30 to 65** birds (S.W.W.P.). This species then shares the honour of 'rarest nesting waterbird species in the South-West' with the Little Egret and the three species of bittern.

### 3. Population Estimates

Some of the more interesting estimates of population size in the study area are given below. These are based on data processed to February 1984.

species	Number of wetlands recorded from	Wetlands at which Breeding has occurred	Population estimates minimum—maximum	
Little Bittern	7	3	8	20
Australasian Bittern	18	0	19	43
Pacific Black Duck	134	37	7095	25,581
Pink-eared Duck	72	39	6254	11,386
Hardhead	72	13	2887	7,731
Spotless Crane	20	4	33	118
Wood Sandpiper	4	—	32	64
Greenshank	44	—	267	712
Pectoral Sandpiper	5	—	2	6
Gull-billed Tern	9	1	51	38

Note: min. pop. estimate is derived from monthly totals for the study area; max. pop. estimate is the sum of the largest totals ever recorded at each wetland.

It is indeed encouraging to see wider recording of bitterns and crakes. Although their known populations are still gross underestimates, these figures are now quite useful. In reality I would expect Little Bitterns to **overhaul** the Australasian Bitterns in abundance. The relative abundances of the three ducks are largely expectable, but the total is probably **most accurate** for the Hardhead as most of its known favoured haunts are within our study.

### 4. Contributions

The **12 most prolific** contributors of waterbird data sheets have been (in alphabetical order) Bruce Buchanan, Bob Burking, Pauline Clay, Austin Daw, David Doust, Mal Graham, David James, Steve Keeling, Brad Kneebone, Jim Lane, Brenda Newbey and Wayne Zadow. Space precludes printing the full list of contributors. While we are indebted to these persons, we look forward to receiving data **from every participant**. In this regard, we would be very pleased to receive sheets from those who have only sent in five or fewer sheets.

## 5. Regional Maps

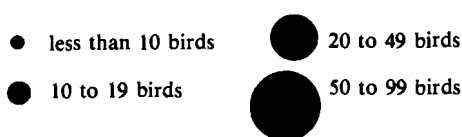
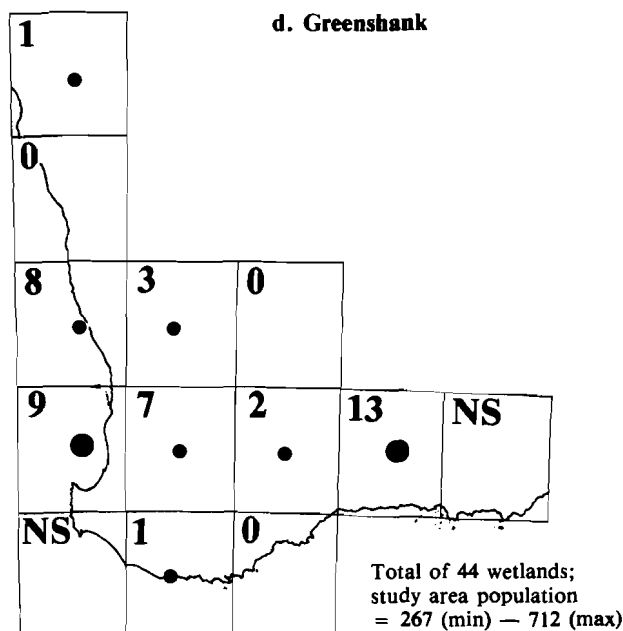
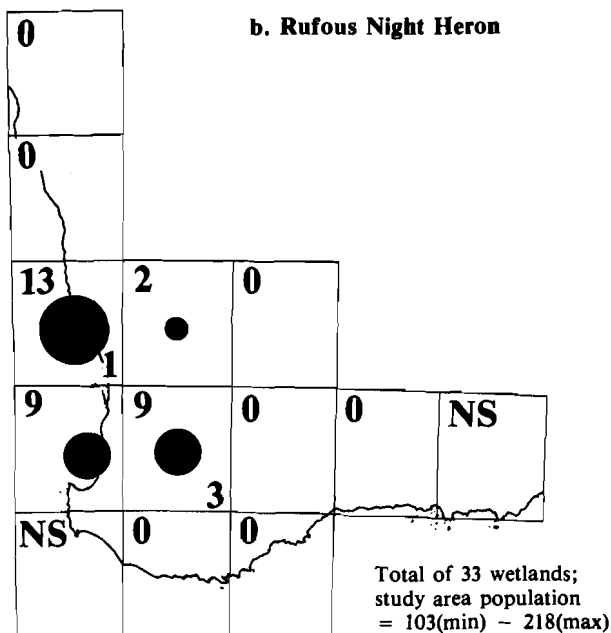
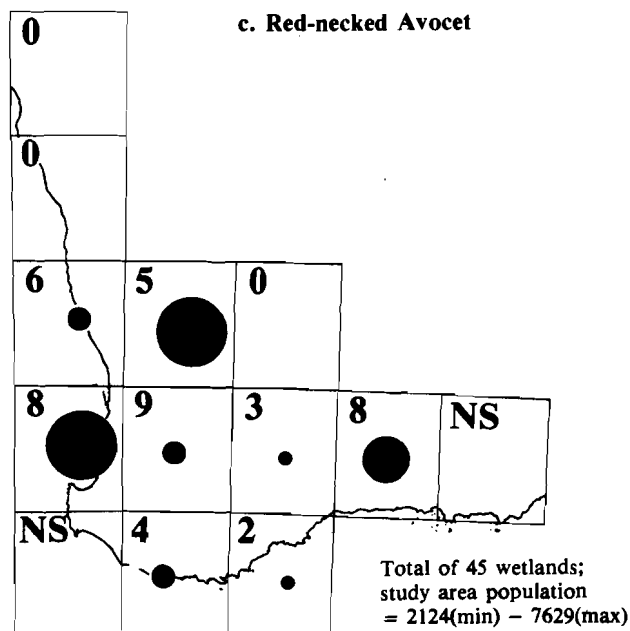
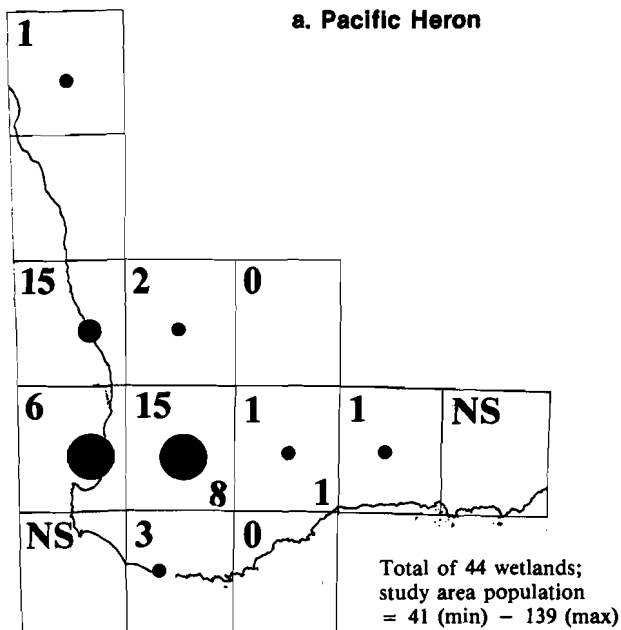
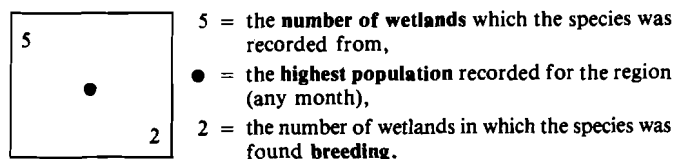
The following maps display differences in occurrence, density, abundance and/or breeding distribution for two pairs of waterbirds.

The **Pacific Heron** and **Rufous Night Heron** probably take similar types of prey but the Night Heron needs to have suitable day-time roosts. The latter requirement would probably exclude the Night Heron (or colonies of these birds at least) from many wetlands outside the south-western corner of W.A. Note that the **core of breeding** by Pacific Herons is in the Narrogin Region but birds are recorded in **greater densities** on the coastal plain (Harvey Region).

The **Greenshank** and **Red-necked Avocet** frequent similar types of wetland, although their bills are designed for somewhat different feeding techniques (and consequently some different food items). The greater population of Greenshanks in the study

regions which include coastline, rather than the inland regions, is not mirrored by the Avocet. Red-necked Avocets seem to be able to make better use of the abundant inland saline lakes than Greenshanks, no doubt being more capable of exploiting the crustaceans thriving in those wetlands.

The grid blocks represent convenient regions (see *WA Bird Notes* No 28) within the study area. The information shown here is:





## 6. Pie Charts

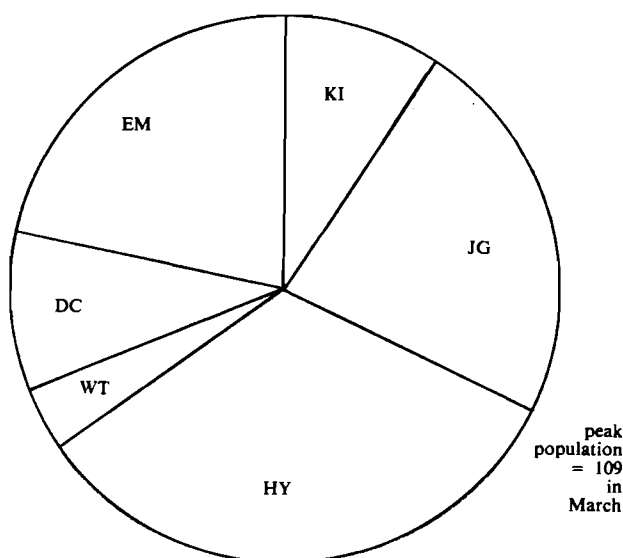
The two pie charts below, compare the importance of different regions of the South-West for two species of waders, during the months which have produced their peak South-West populations.

The peak population of the **Black-fronted Plover** is in March when the birds have greatest representation in the Harvey, Esperance-Munglinup and Jurien-Gingin Regions. These regions have numerous freshwater lakes, swamps and marshes which are the preferred habitat of Black-fronted Plovers. Of course many birds would have been overlooked at small lagoons, dams and ponds.

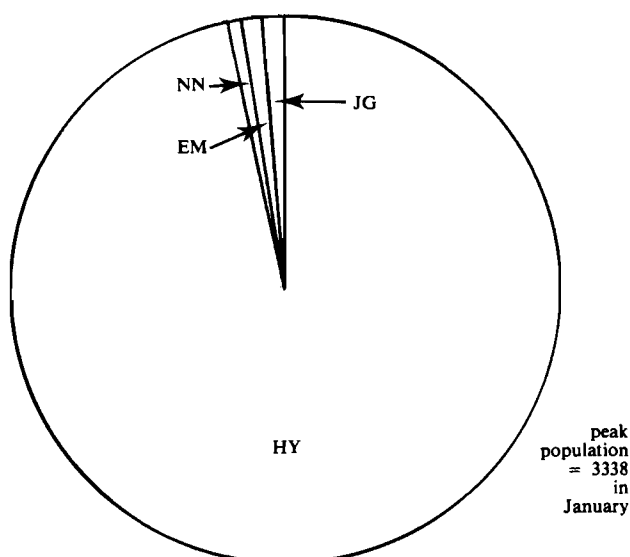
A different picture emerges for the **Curlew Sandpiper** which peaks in January: the great majority of these birds occur in the Harvey Region. Curlew Sandpipers occur in similar environments to Black-fronted Plovers, but large concentrations in Swan Coastal Plain estuaries and lakes reduce the significance to this species of wetlands in other regions.

The pie charts display information for the month in which the peak population estimate occurred, for two species. The sectors of each chart illustrate the *proportion of the peak population* that was present in various regions of the Project's study area, in the peak month. This gives us some idea of the relative importance of different regions to these waterbird species.

a. Black-fronted Plover



b. Curlew Sandpiper



### KEY TO REGIONS

KI = Kalbarri  
JG = Jurien-Gingin  
HY = Harvey  
WT = Wongan-Tammin

NN = Narrogin  
DC = Denmark-Cranbrook  
EM = Esperance-Munglinup

## 7. Information

a. **New Waterbird Office** — Suite 30, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road (South), Canning Bridge, W.A. 6153. Phone (09) 364 6202.

b. **Preferred Survey Periods** — March 10-18, May 12-20, July 14-22, September 8-16.

c. **Assistance in March, April and May**

The Clerical Assistant for the Waterbird Project, **Shapelle McNee**, will be able to deal with many requests for help while I am overseas from March to May. She will be able to post out computer forms and booklets, refer to entries in the data bank and on printouts and suggest other authorities to contact with reserve management matters. I have instructed her in the workings of the Project so that she may be able to assist with most queries.

Please do not hesitate to write or ring the Waterbird Office. Address Waterbird Project mail to:

'The Field Officer' or

'The Field Officer,

Waterbird Project'.

d. **Final Year of Survey:**

Beginning with the survey in July and ending in the May 1985 census, we will have the final year of fieldwork for the Project. It would be beneficial for all participants to assess the thoroughness and effectiveness of their survey efforts prior to June, 1984. Obviously, we would stand to gain considerably from making the final year as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

Questions to ask yourself could include:

- Am I covering as much of the wetland as I can, while still counting birds at a fair level of accuracy? Or more importantly . . .
- Are the route and basic methods that I'm using consistent for each survey (including special techniques where needed — e.g. at times of bird concentration)?
- Am I possibly missing some waterbird species (read up on habitats and behaviour of waterbirds in texts)?

I hope to be in contact with all participants in June or July to make further comments and suggestions. However, any observer should feel free to write with queries. I can't promise to reply immediately due to the backlog of mail to be dealt with after my overseas study trip. Nevertheless, I will reply as soon as I possibly can.

R.J.

## INTERESTING WATERBIRD SIGHTINGS

### No. 10 Summer 1983-84

**Note:**\* indicates wetland is **not** within a WAWA Wetland Nature Reserve being studied in the Waterbird Project. Unless otherwise indicated, the place names refer to lakes or swamps. To assist the reader, shire names are given in brackets following the wetland names.

#### (a) Interesting localities (new or unusual)

NL = New locality for SWWP.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Great Crested Grebe  | — 10, 30/10, Martinup (Woodanilling): NL.     |
|                      | — 2, 11/1, Utcha (Northampton): NL.           |
| Great Egret          | — 13, 8/1, Deadman's (W. Arthur).             |
| Australasian Bittern | — 2, Sept. 1983, Condungup area* (Esperance). |
|                      | — 1, 17/11, McLarty* (Murray): NL.            |
|                      | — 1, 22/11, Tordit-Garrup (Manjimup): NL.     |
|                      | — 4, 9/12, Kulunilup (Cranbrook): NL.         |



Little Bittern	— 1, 21/11, Angove (Albany): NL.
	— 4, 9/12, Kulunilup: NL.
Glossy Ibis	— 4, 7/1, Big Bootine* (Gingin).
Freckled Duck	— 2, 8/10, Qualeup* (Boyup Brook).
	— 25, 24/11, Casuarina (Katanning): NL.
Osprey	— 1, 20/1, Gardner (Albany): NL.
Baillon's Crake	— 1, trapped at Forrestdale L., Jan: adult.
Lesser Golden Plover	— 1, 15/1, Gore (Esperance): NL.
Hooded Plover	— 8, 16/11, Camel (Cranbrook): NL.
Wood Sandpiper	— 4, 4/2, Big Bootine* (Gingin).
Grey-Tailed Tattler	— 1, 7/12, swamps S of L. Gore (Esperance) NL.
Marsh Sandpiper	— 2, 9/12, Coomberdale West* (Moora).
Bar-tailed Godwit	— 7, 9/11, Mullet (Esperance): NL.
Sanderling	— 1, 29/10, Little Murapin (Woodanilling): NL.
Whiskered Tern	— 25, 21/9, Walyormouring (Goomalling).

#### (b) Uncommon or rare species

Royal Spoonbill	— 1, 19/11, Chandala (Chittering).
	— 2, 4/2, Thomsons (Cockburn): NL.
Little Ringed Plover	— 1, 12/2 (also in January), Forrestdale (Metro): third year occurring here.
Terek Sandpiper	— 1, 17/11, Harvey R. delta (Murray): NL.
	— 1, Dec., Alfred Cove (Metro).
Pectoral Sandpiper	— 1, 30/1, Forrestdale.
	— 1, 12/2, McLarty* (Murray).
Gull-billed Tern	— 1, 17/11, Harvey R. delta (Murray): NL.

#### (c) Interesting high totals

The figure in brackets next to the species' name is the known population (min.) for the study area, based on data processed to 31 January 1984. New data = †.

Great Egret - (182)	— 237†, 11/2, Vasse Estuary (Busselton).
Purple Swamphen - (221)	— 325, mid Feb., Herdsman* (Metro).
Red-clapped Plover - (4789)	— 18, 14/1, Mortlock R East (Tamin); small wetland.
Black-fronted Plover - (109)	— 48†, 4/2, Wallering (Gingin).
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - (2500)	— 626†, 11/2, Vasse Estuary (Busselton).
Long-toed Stint - (28)	— 60†, 12/2, McLarty* (Murray).

#### (d) Breeding observations

Darter	— late 1983, nest with young, 'Samphire' (Gingin).
	— 18, 2/1, Chittering (Chittering): 4 nests in use - only one in 1981.
	— 5, 20/2, 3 active nests, P.W. No. 8 (Gingin).
Little Black Cormorant	— 200, 7/1, Towerrinning NW Swamp (West Arthur): 80 nests.
Pacific Heron	— 2, 10/11, Towerrinning; nest with eggs and young.
	— 4, Nov., Blue Gum Lake* (Moora): bird sitting on nest.
Little Bittern	— Breeding at Forrestdale and Jandabup (Metro) in November 1983;

see National Newsletter and forthcoming SWANS.

	— 7, 2/2, Yarnup (Cranbrook): 5 active nests, 3 of these with eggs (some fresh). A total of 19 nests of various ages.
Freckled Duck	— A 1983 nest with cold egg, Dec., Benger (Harvey).
	— 2 adults plus 3 ducklings (10 days old), 13/12, Crackers Swamp (Dandaragan).
Australasian Shoveler	— Adult plus 4 chicks, 4/1, Murchison R at Four Mile Pool. River high and flowing after rain inland.
Hardhead	— 30 plus several young, 18/11, Yurine (Gingin).
Hooded Plover	— Adults with chicks, 5/1, Hamelin Bay near Augusta.
Gull-billed Tern	— 31, 28/10, Hinds (Wongan-Ballidu): 21 nest with eggs, one also with a chick.

## INTERESTING SIGHTINGS AT WANNAMAL LAKE WETLAND NATURE RESERVE

An extensive **thunderstorm** which occurred in the Mogumber-Wannamal area on 29 December 1983 created a number of interesting bird sightings during a Waterbird Usage survey at Wannamal Lake on the 30th. A total of **75mm of rain** had been dumped during a five hour period causing extensive flooding of adjacent agricultural land, dispersing large numbers of ducks (mainly Blacks) from the wetland.

On arrival at the lake at 9.15 a.m., we had doubts as to the amount of information that could be recorded. We were agreeably surprised some 4½ hours later to tally a total of **1118 birds from 20 species**. Compared to data recorded in other years, the December total was well down but the storm had dispersed the usual large numbers.

The disappointment of the low figures was made up by the recording of two new **breeding** species: Hoary-headed and Australasian Grebes. Since recording started in July 1981 no nests of these species had been found. A group of **17 Freckled Duck including 5 juveniles** once again confirmed that the sanctuary section at the northern end of the wetland is an important breeding and refuge area for this species.

The highlight of the day was the recording of two new species for the usage records. An **Osprey** was observed flying over the wetland adjacent to the western shoreline. The timely arrival of a Channel 9 News helicopter filming the storm damage flushed an Eastern Reef Egret from the eastern shoreline. Not previously sighted during surveys, it is assumed that the storm may have created the unusual situation. Breeding was still underway by Pink-eared Ducks and nests were located in both natural situations and in the **nesting boxes** installed by the WA Field and Game Association.

The wetland depth-gauge recorded a depth of 1.32 m and with floodwaters pouring in, it will ensure a good depth of water for a large number of waterbird species, but may reduce the number of waders normally recorded from late February to May.

The waterbird usage record for Wannamal Lake now lists a total of **36 species** of which 11 use the wetland as a breeding habitat.

Lynn and Bob Burking

## MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

### WATERBIRD RESCUE

Under suitable conditions such as high temperatures, suitable organic medium, and an absence of atmospheric oxygen, the spores of a bacteria responsible for outbreaks of botulism in wetlands in the South-West can grow and multiply. This occurred at **Thomsons Lake** and to a lesser extent at Lake Forrestdale during late January and February this year.

Botulism is a **bacterial poisoning**. The bacteria responsible *Clostridium botulinum* produces a toxin which birds swallow as they feed in the wetlands. This toxin is then absorbed through the digestive tract, into the blood stream and thus reaches the peripheral nervous system where it attacks the nerves and causes paralysis. If a large enough dose of the toxin is taken, death occurs via paralysis of the respiratory system.

Members who attended the Thomsons Lake excursion on Saturday 4 February were unexpectedly faced with an advanced stage of botulism. As a result, work was started on treating the afflicted birds. **Karen McRoberts** headed this rescue and reports below.

Rescue work has been very successful to date — out of approximately 250 birds rescued, **200 or so have recovered**. The treatment and rehabilitation of these birds involves giving each bird a dose of a special formula of salts. The details of the disease and of how to treat affected birds are given in a **booklet** produced by the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife, "Treatment of Waterfowl, Algal Poisoning and Botulism". Some of the treated birds have been released, others are still recuperating. (Records are being kept, but are not yet complete.)

**Volunteers** have worked hard keeping up with Thomsons' victims. Forrestdale lake has been only minimally afflicted, but big problems may occur if hot temperatures return. One of the hardest and most unpleasant jobs has been to collect the hundreds of decaying bodies for burial.

Those of you familiar with these large lakes will know that the physical work involved is very demanding, especially in 40° + heat. Remembering that many hands make lighter work, how about volunteering to help? We only have one chap to help us from Fisheries and Wildlife, so you will no doubt be welcome by the Department.

**Patients** have included Black Swans, Pacific Black Ducks, White-faced Herons, Coots, Purple Swampheens, Australian Shelducks, Australasian Shovelers, Grey Teal, and even Pink-eared Ducks and Long-toed Stints!

If you would like to help, assuming the problem is still persisting, please contact **Bill or Karen McRoberts on 459 1971**. Many Thanks.

### A DAY'S BIRDING

**A team's report from the  
Summer Bird Tally, 13 December 1983**

The day for us did not start till 6 a.m. and by the time four of us were together it was about 6.30. In the improving light we headed off to **Ocean Reef Marina** where we failed to find an Eastern Reef-Egret (Reef Heron). Then on to Neil Hawkins Park where a flock of 30 Red-capped Parrots was the main feature. A quick drive through the **Wanneroo Hospital Carpark** added a Yellow-throated Miner to our list. We detoured down Pipaninay Road where we spent a lot of time trying to identify the groups or brown fairy-wrens — no males were in evidence. We made up for these with a solitary Tawny-crowned Honeyeater and White-browed Scrubwrens carrying food.

Two nests of Dusky Woodswallows and a Grey Shrike-thrush were found in **Yanchep National Park en route** to Two Rocks. Bridled Terns were flying around their nesting rock and a Bartailed Godwit was feeding amongst the Turnstones near the Marina. A Reef-Egret peered around some rocks at us as Alma discovered a party of White-winged Fairy-wrens. Hunger now forced us to try the quality of sticky buns. A Common Sandpiper amongst the boats made us briefly put down the buns and coffee.

Down the coast a flock of Sanderling on the reef made a nice addition to our list. A small pool near Wanneroo added a Pacific Heron, A White-winged Triller and a solitary Yellow-rumped Thornbill — the only thornbill of the day.

A brief drive around **Herdsmen Lake** produced a bonus in the way of a Rufous Night Heron. Perry spotted both the Marsh Harrier and a Little Falcon (Hobby). Hunger again caused a pause in the growth of our list as we munched our sandwiches by Lake Monger. We failed to find a Pink-eared Duck but a Darter was spotted perched on an old lamp post in the lake.

Our list was now in the 80's and we meandered down to the Uni looking for Spotted Turtle-Doves, but without luck. In the grounds we found a pair of Rainbow Lorikeets.

At **Pelican Point** there were more birders than birds but we managed to identify our second species of fairy-wren — Variegated, as well as a few waders.

"The hundred" now seemed easily within our grasp much to our surprise. After all, 6 more species in 3-and-a-half hours should be easy!

So off to **John Forrest**; no Corellas in their usual place along the Swan River, but a Spotted Turtle-Dove made up for them. The park was frustrating — empty of birds, with the car behind us irritated by our slow pace. We were rewarded by a Splendid Fairy-wren and a party of Sitellas. Still two birds short, we scanned the honeyeaters flitting around the bottlebrush but nothing unusual; no robins and thornbills — we were surely going to fail!

The journey back to Perth was uninspiring. Tired and frustrated we looked for Sacred Ibis at **Lake Carine**; they had not come in to roost yet. Peter spotted a speck in a bush in the middle of the lake, a Black-shouldered Kite: 99 down and one to go.

A quick shower and we collected the nibblies as we headed off to WAIT. As we passed Lake Monger a cry from Perry in the back seat "Corella" — a whole flock of them: **100 species in 12 hours and 250 km.**

During the ensuing splendid Barbecue we were surprised at being as high as second. Plans were already being made for next year. Is **150 species in 24 hours possible?**

**Geoff Shannon**

### PRELIMINARY REPORT ON WADER MORTALITY AT FORRESTDAL LAKE

#### Thursday, 23 February

Only about 15% of the lake was covered by surface water. Doug Watkins estimated there to be 4,000 waders feeding on the exposed mud and in the shallow water that afternoon.

#### Friday, 24 February

Lake Forrestdale was aerially sprayed (dusted) at about 0730 by the Armadale Council with Abate for midges.

#### Saturday, 25 February

At 1000 Steve Keeling, Simon and Michelle Nevill saw the first dead waders in the centre of the lake. The estimated number of waders present was 2,000 +. From 1630 to 1900, 53 Red-necked Stints, 3 Red-capped Plovers and 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were picked up from the lake (all dead) by Steve Keeling and Peter Curry. There was no evidence of larger waterbirds such as ducks being afflicted.

#### Sunday, 26 February

At 1230 a party of observers (Tim and Janet Williams and their two sons, Duncan Parish, Doug Watkins and Shapelle McNee), unaware of casualties found on Saturday, viewed at least 2,000 waders and 30-odd Shelduck. One dead Red-necked Stint and one dying stint were found. The water level had dropped with only a few patches of surface water present. During Sunday a further 103 Red-necked Stints, 1 Long-toed Stint, 11 Red-capped Plovers and 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper were picked up dead by David James and John Malone. Some sick birds were sighted independently by Norma Duff at Alfred Cove.

### Monday, 27 February

No surface water present on the lake. An estimate of 400 birds were present of which about 50 were Red-necked Stints. At 0700 Mike Bamford, Doug Watkins, Duncan Parish and Shapelle McNee searched Forrestdale Lake for any dead waders. A total of 42 Red-necked Stints, 1 Long-toed Stint, 1 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, 9 Red-capped Plovers and 1 Red-capped Plover runner were picked up dead. During that afternoon a further 8 dead Red-necked Stints were found. Dead birds were being analysed for evidence of botulism or organo-phosphate poisoning at the Department of Agriculture.

### Tuesday, 28 February

About 200 waders were present on the lake. Dead recoveries included 4 Red-necked Stints and 2 Red-capped Plovers. One live but afflicted Red-necked Stint was found and sent to the Department of Agriculture for treatment. An antedote to organo-phosphate poisoning (Atropine) was given to the bird.

S. Keeling and S. McNee

## BERLEY FOR WADERS

In mid-April, I was fishing from a beach at Miami, using a berley made from bran, dripping and fish oil — bran being the main ingredient. In the process of applying the berley to a wooden float (blob), a fair amount of it is dropped onto the sand — also from the hands when they are cleaned (?) before picking up the rod to cast.

Silver Gulls are always on stand-by to come in and pick up any large scraps of berley or any unguarded bait, when one goes away to cast.

After fishing for some time, I moved my gear about 15 metres along the beach. My vacated spot was soon occupied by the Silver Gulls and soon after, by a flock of approximately 50 sandpipers picking up the small pieces of berley.

When I had finished fishing, I cleaned some fish and left the heads and gut on the beach for the Silver Gulls. The sandpipers quickly moved into the now vacated spot and I watched as two sandpipers, which were lucky enough to find a piece of gut, did a fast sprint down to the water to wash away the sand before eating.

I have fished on many beaches and chased away many generations of Silver Gulls from many generations of bait but that is the one and only time that I have ever seen a **clean-up squad of waders!**

I fished the same beach on the next day. The Silver Gulls and sandpipers were present but the sandpipers never gave a repeat performance. In fact another angler, when he had finished fishing, emptied a bag of dry bran onto the dry sand. This proved to be an attraction to the Silver Gulls, until they found it to be too difficult to eat, but failed to attract the sandpipers.

However on the following day, after a night without wind, I noticed that the bran pile had been reduced in size. On closer investigation and seeing the thousands of small foot prints on the bran and the surrounding sand, one would hardly qualify for a Sherlock award to know **Wotdiddit!**

Jack Donohoe

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

### (A) SOUTH-WEST AND EUCLA

#### 1. Swanbourne—White-winged Fairy-wrens

Edna Milne and Bruce and Anne Buchanan wrote to say that on 17 December 1983 they encountered eleven White-winged Fairy-wrens in sandhills just north of Swanbourne Beach Bathing Pavilion. Two coloured males and some immatures were seen in the party moving between the low bushes (e.g. coastal salt-bush).

Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* indicate that although principally distributed in the arid zone of W.A., these fairy-wrens occur as far south on the Coastal Plain as the Perth metro area (City Beach, Swan River marshes). The salt-marsh and dune-scrub on which these birds depend for shelter is subject to continued pressure for 'development', so the remain-

ing populations of White-winged Fairy-wrens in Perth deserve to be watched closely.

#### 2. Woodmans Point—Fork-tailed Swifts

Edna Milne, Tom Delaney and Jack Donohoe had a swift look at 5 Fork-tailed Swifts which swiftly circled overhead for a few swift moments at Woodmans Point on the 9th February 1984. Serventy and Whittell indicate that swifts are mostly seen in southern WA in January and February, associated with low pressure weather systems.

J.D.

#### 3. Rottnest Waterbirds — late January 1984

**Bridled Terns** usually nesting on an off shore island at North Point were not nesting this season. Each year there is a breeding pair of **Red-necked Avocets** on the lake just inland from Nancy Cove. These had not yet hatched at our visit. A second breeding pair this year were at the west end of lake Baghdad with two fluffy youngsters. Another pair were sighted on Pink Lake. These were the only 6 birds seen this year, whereas in 1981 there were 45 avocets on Pink Lake.

Mary Bremner

#### 4. From Steve Keeling

In December 1984, six **Little Egrets** were seen at Herdsman Lake. This is an unusually large group of these birds for the metro area, but Little Egrets seem to be regular summer visitors there now. A **Wandering (Water) Whistling-Duck** was also seen at Herdsman in the same month. Several years ago, David James recorded this tropical duck at Forrestdale.

At a large sandpit in Wattle Grove, Steve found three or more **White-backed Swallows** attending a nest-hole in the sand bank (13 Nov. 1983). A pair of **Square-tailed Kites** were spotted at Manjimup in January 1984.

#### 5. At Tenterden

Tom Hordacre reports a flock of 38 **Straw-necked Ibises** at 'Balijup' near Tenterden on 18 October 1983. His farm dogs were barking at the birds perched in white gums close to the house and feeding beneath the trees in fallen leaves and bark. After a while, the ibises flew in a circling pattern to about 500 feet and then soared to an altitude of more than 2,000 feet before drifting off to the north.

#### 6. From Ongerup

**Rufous Treecreepers** have reappeared in the township of Ongerup (which has quite a few salmon gums) after many years of absence. Also, a group of about 20 **Crimson Chats** were seen in an area just W of Ongerup for at least three weeks in November 1983. Brenda Newbey has not heard of anyone seeing the chats at Ongerup before. (See last newsletter for other Crimson Chat observations).

#### 7. Esperance — seabirds

Austin Daw reports finding a dead **Thin-billed Prion** in August 1983, on the beach east of Bandy Creek (see note in last issue). Also recovered was a dead **Rockhopper Penguin** on the beach west of Observatory Point.

On 24 October, Austin and Arpita Hayes went to Lorraine Island where they found about 2,000 active burrows of the **White-faced Storm-Petrel** (under 'renovation'). Three pairs of **Sooty Oystercatchers** were defending territories and one nest with a single egg was found.

In early February 1984, Austin went with Jack Ewart to Stokes Inlet where six nests of **Fairy Terns** were found. Two speckled young only just able to fly were found nearby.

#### 8. News from Newdegate

The **Spotted Harriers** mentioned in *WA Bird Notes* No. 28 raised one young to free flight but the other fell victim to the storms of November. A **bustard** was seen S of Holt Rock on 10 January 1984. Graeme and Liz Frusher's tame **butcherbird** was recently evicted from its feeding perch on their front verandah by a persistent Magpie-lark. The Magpie-lark was not interested in meat put out for the butcherbirds, but may have been escaping the heat.

#### 9. Late breeding at Dumbleyung

**Banded Lapwings** ('Plovers') were sitting on three eggs at John Dart's Dumbleyung farm on 8 February. **Black-shouldered Kites** had only just finished breeding: two young were nearly ready to leave the nest.

#### 10. Crested Bellbirds near Gingin

Arpita Hayes reports hearing three or more Crested Bellbirds proclaiming territory in low scrub SW of Gingin on 18 and 19

December (early morning). These birds were **not known** to occur SW of Mogumber until 1954. Other interesting birds seen were Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Hooded Robins.

#### **11. Greenough River and Dongara**

Diane Beckingham spent a few days in early December investigating the Greenough River between Walkaway and Eradu. Australasian Grebes had two young and falcons were nesting in the cliffs. Waders seen at Denison included a Lesser Golden Plover and a tattler.

### **(B) ARID ZONE**

#### **1. Princess Parrots east of Kalgoorlie**

Wildlife Officer P.J. Collins from Kalgoorlie has reported sightings of Princess Parrots on Wednesday 27 July 1983 at Queen Victoria Nature Reserve (Grid Ref. 30° 28' 123° 41'). The first sighting was 10km west of Drill Hole 9 where a flock of 15 large long-tailed parrots were seen. The second sighting was 4km further west in an area of Triodia Mallee association where a flock of about 18 were seen. The birds were pale or dusty green/grey in colour and looked about 380 mm (15") in length with a long tapering tail. On each occasion the birds flew towards the observer and veered off.

Serventy and Whittell describe the Princess Parrot (Alexandra Parrot) as an, "inhabitant of the arid interior, occurring north almost to the Fitzroy River and south to Wiluna, Sandstone and occasionally Menzies. It occurs eastwards through the Great Victoria and Gibson Deserts to the central Australian range country." Princess Parrots feed mainly from spinifex *Triodia* seed and so are to some extent restricted to spinifex country.

## **NOTICES**

#### **1. Ground Parrot Field Officer**

The RAOU is still accepting applications for the position of Field Officer for its **Survey of the Distribution of the Ground Parrot in Western Australia**. The period of employment will be from June to December 1984 with salary of \$8,000 and travelling allowance (23 cents per km) for use of a private vehicle.

**Duties** will include identification of likely Ground Parrot habitat between Israelite Bay and Cape Leeuwin, **organising groups of amateurs** in weekend searches at prospective sites and preparation of a report. **Further details** are available from the WA office of the RAOU.

The Research Committee will consider **all** applications at its meeting in Melbourne in May. Applications should be sent to **The Director, RAOU, 21 Gladstone St., Moonee Ponds, Victoria 3039 before Friday 27 April.**

#### **2. Field Officer joins Jet-Set?**

From Wednesday 14 March to Monday 27 May, the Field Officer will be overseas on both study leave and holiday. For part of this period, he will be representing 'ornithology in W.A.' on a **Rotary Study Exchange with Japan** (Osaka area). Visits to the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology and Wild Bird Society of Japan have been planned.

Two weeks will be spent in **England** visiting the British Trust for Ornithology and RSPB reserves. The final overseas activity will be to represent the RAOU at the IUCN's **Convention on Wetlands of International Importance** in the Netherlands.

The Waterbirds Project Assistant will deal with as much **mail** as possible while the F.O. is away. Envelopes with Waterbird Project correspondence should be identified with "*The Field Officer, RAOU Waterbird Project etc.*"

#### **3. Atlas Promotion**

The RAOU is desperately in need of colour slides of Atlasers in action, for promotion of the Atlas publication. If you can help us in any way, please contact Mandy Silberstein, 5 Corry Lynn Road, Claremont, Phone 384 3185.

#### **4. 1982 Bird Report**

A final reminder to all members that the 1982 Bird Report will be mailed to them **unless** they notify Geoff Shannon that they do not wish to receive it. The anticipated cost will be approx. \$5.00. A colour print of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper at Eyre will appear on the front cover.

Geoff Shannon

#### **5. Reed Warbler Study**

I am doing a study of movement patterns and moult cycles of Clamorous Reed Warblers. Is anyone able to comment on population changes in an area or supply data for banding, particularly in the Wheat-belt or up North? Please contact me at 31 Lawbrook Road, Walliston, 6076 (Phone 291 7592) Steve Keeling

#### **6. Easter at Christmas Island**

Over the Easter long-weekend 20-23 April, Hoger's Australian Adventure Tours will be conducting a tour to Christmas Island. One of the most spectacular birds to be seen is the endemic Golden Bosunbird. For more details please phone Ralph Hoger on (09) 335 6884.

#### **7. Kimberley Ornithological Trip 12th-27th May, 1984**

Coate's Tours will be taking a two week trip around the Kimberley area of Western Australia during the May School Holidays for those interested in bird-watching. The **all inclusive cost of \$895.00** includes air flight from Perth to Derby and return from Broome.

A wide cross-section of bird habitat will be seen, with ample time for identification. Places visited will include: Camballin — Geikie Gorge — Kununurra — Midjana Gorge — Gibb River Road — with flight over Bungle Bungle as an optional extra.

For further information contact: Kevin Coate, 21 Acanthus Road, Willetton 6155, W.A. Telephone 457 1515.

#### **8. Thomson's Lake Bird Guide**

Stephen Ambrose and Pauline and Brian Clay of the Department of Zoology, University of W.A. are compiling a **guide to bird species of Thomson's Lake and neighbouring Harry Waring Marsupial Reserve, Coogee**. 148 species have been extracted from available records, but any additional information on birds of this area will be greatly appreciated.

Contact **Stephen Ambrose**, Department of Zoology, University of W.A., Nedlands 6009. Telephone 380 2227 (work) or (095) 277873 (home).

#### **9. Pizzeyes**

A *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by Graham Pizzey is available in a paper-back edition for \$14.00 each by placing an order with **Brian Barrett** phone (09) 295 2136, or to 4 Wilura Road, Mundaring, W.A. 6073.

We have been waiting for a **reprint** of this edition which should be available in late March. Those that have already placed orders with Roger or Shapelle will receive their copy hot from the printers as soon as possible.

#### **10. Kimberley — Arnhem Land — Cape York Trip**

Michelle and Simon Nevill are hoping to travel in these areas between May and November 1984. They would be thrilled to learn of any distinct and interesting localities to visit, with any information about them. Sketch plans or written information can be dropped at the RAOU Office or at **38 Pether Place, Manning**, or Simon can be contacted on **450 2460**. In return, Simon and Michelle can offer to hopefully tell you of their travels and show slides on their return. Even a brief message will be most appreciated.

#### **11. The Canoe Shop,**

924 Albany Highway, East Victoria Park. Phone 362 6864  
Full range of new canoes and Kayaks, plus many secondhand. All accessories. Plus Canoe Hire — day, weekend or weekly. Contact Geoff or Martin Chambers.

#### **12. A Voice on the National RAOU Council?**

The RAOU Council is the body which largely determines policy and happenings within the RAOU. In order to see that our 400 + W.A. members (almost 25% of total RAOU membership) have a fair say at the top levels of the RAOU, two members have nominated **Dr. Brian Collins**, Head of the School of Biology at WAIT to stand for election to Council.

RAOU members in W.A. should shortly receive **proxy voting forms** for the A.G.M. (to be held in May) along with financial statements etc. Please vote for Brian Collins and also Mrs. Geraldine de Burgh-Day (nominated by Council; a former Western Australian), and return the proxy forms immediately.