



Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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A STORM OF PETRELS

Many readers will be aware of the appearance of hundreds of dead and dying seabirds along the coast of the South-West during the first week in August, 1984. So many people were discovering weak, dying or dead seabirds on the beaches, streets and gardens of Perth that media coverage was inevitable. Through the auspices of radio, television news and our regular newspaper journalist Alex Harris, the plight of the birds and the interest of the RAOU in the phenomenon were given good publicity (see page 1 of *The West Australian*, 9 August 1984).

Exhausted or dead albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters are found on or near beaches in the south of W.A. (and indeed the continent) every winter. Loss of these few individuals probably has little impact on the populations of seabirds feeding at sea off our south and west coasts. A Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* found on 28 July on Rockingham Beach by Peter Wilmot was probably an example of the usual winter mortality of seabirds.

Of course, living seabirds are frequently seen from fishing boats, off Rottnest Island, from the Rottnest ferries or even adjacent to the shore of the mainland (eg. two Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* at North Mole, Fremantle, on 9 July). Stormy weather, with W to SW winds provides conditions which bring seabirds into the viewing range of shore-based observers. Normally albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters feed many kilometres from land, sometimes concentrating near the continental shelf. They skim above the surface of the sea on stiff, bowed wings, drifting for long distances without needing to flap.

West to south-west winds buffeted the west coast of WA for more than four days in the first week in August. Particularly severe gales were associated with this weather system at more southerly latitudes and doubtless played a part in drawing large numbers of seabirds northwards to the SW of the continent.

Petrels caught up in these winds could not sustain their efforts to return to sea because the weather did not relent within a day or so, as it usually does. Unprecedented mortality subsequently occurred, though this would have been a little higher were it not for the patient efforts of 'emergency bird nursing homes' set up by bird-lovers in Perth.

One of the first fatalities was a Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* found dead on South Street, Murdoch on 4 August. These birds are not uncommon off our coastline but are rarely seen eight kilometres inland!

On 6, 7, and 8 August, Blue Petrels and Kerguelen Petrels *Pterodroma neglecta* were seen flying between sand dunes near the West Coast Highway and dead or living birds were collected as far inland as Swan View and other hills localities. Telephones



This Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata* was picked up on Friday 20 July at Woodman Point by Doug Nash. It was identified by Ron Johnstone from bill measurements. The 'M' pattern on the upperwing is common to all prions and the Blue Petrel, but the Blue Petrel is unique in having a white-tipped tail.

at the W.A. Museum and RAOU Office were busy with enquiries: quite a few residents of Perth had found a petrel on their street or front lawn!

Surveys of beaches by Sue Gordon, Roger Jaensch (RAOU) and John Roberts (Perth City Council) yielded the following results:

- 2 km, near Two Rocks: 24 Blue Petrels, 9 Kerguelen petrels, one prion (total = 34);
- 0.5 km, Mullaloo: 21 Blue Petrels, 8 Kerguelen Petrels, two 'broad-billed' prions, one 'thin-billed' prion (total = 32);
- 1.5 km, N. Fremantle: 18 Blue Petrels, one Kerguelen Petrel, three 'broad-billed' prions, one Cape Petrel (total = 23).

Total counted = 131 birds (mostly dead): 69% Blue Petrel, 24% Kerguelen Petrel, 5% prion species.

Prions could not always be identified with certainty due to the overlap in dimensions of bills and wings of the six widely recognized species. Most dead prions were rather decomposed, suggesting that they had been brought in by earlier storms. They, like many specimens, are being examined by staff at the W.A. Museum which now has an invaluable reference collection of seabirds from this event.

Only a few Blue and Kerguelen Petrels have been previously recovered from beaches of the South-West. There were no records of the Kerguelen Petrel from WA during the Atlas, and only one of the Blue Petrel. Twenty Kerguelens were recovered from the Coorong Beach in S.A. from 25-31 August 1981, while individuals were also recovered at inland S.A. localities after fierce southerly gales.

Both species of petrel breed on Kerguelen and Marion Islands; the Kerguelen Islands are 4000 km from Perth, near the Antarctic Convergence.

COMING MEETINGS

Meetings are at present held in the **Mathematics Lecture Room 1**, near Fairway Entrance No. 3 (actually opposite the Weatherburn Lecture Theatre), at the **University of W.A.** campus. The March '84 and December '83 issues of the newsletter contain maps of the approaches to this room.

There is some debate at present as to the suitability of this venue for our needs. Comments from members would be appreciated and these should be directed to Committee members.

Meetings commence at 8.00 p.m. although the room is open from 7.30 p.m. It is often better to catch up with committee members and field officers before the meeting starts as they are frequently inundated by the requests of members at the conclusion of meetings. Visitors are especially welcome.

Monday, September 24: Bird study in the Northern Hemisphere especially Asia

Australia has moved into an era of greater international cooperation in bird study and conservation programmes. The RAOU will probably become actively involved in a broad survey of waterbirds in southern Asia in 1985.

Roger Jaensch will present an illustrated report on ornithology in Japan and Hong Kong, as well as wetland reserves and waterbird management in the U.K. and Netherlands. A number of WA Group members generously supported his recent tour.

A brief report on *Interwader '83* might also be presented. This wader study expedition to Singapore and Malaysia was supported by the RAOU and set the stage for further work in south and east Asia.

Monday, January 14, Annual Meeting

Wine and cheese will probably precede this important event, the venue for which is to be announced in the December newsletter. Come along to exercise your vote and hear how the W.A. Group progressed over the past year.

COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

We are attempting to alternate between Saturday and Sunday excursions from September onwards, provided that this arrangement brings good response. After August, we also hope to plan excursions for as near as possible to the middle (i.e. 15th) of each month, on a trial basis.

The Excursions Sub-Committee of the RAOU-WA Group has decided to place some control on the number of major/"Official" RAOU campouts that it organises each year. In 1984 we propose to run no more than four such events: two have passed (Torrey, Rott) and two are outlined below.

Newcomers are always welcome at excursions and campouts and more experienced bird-watchers are only too pleased to assist with identification of unfamiliar birds.

Special Waterbird Survey — September 6-7: Gingilip Swamps

The Gingilip Swamps Nature Reserve is a large area of heath and rush swamps about which very little is known. A brief account of the area appeared in *SWANS* Vol 12, No 1 (1982). We suspect that it may be an important area for bitterns and rails.

A two day expedition will commence from **Alexandra Bridge at 11.00 a.m. on Thursday 6 September**. The overnight camp will be in the vicinity of Scott River and campers will need to be self-sufficient.

Any observers interested in joining our survey team are encouraged to contact Roger Jaensch at the RAOU Office.

CAMPOUT — September 8-9: Northcliffe and Windy Harbour

We are awaiting confirmation of the exact site for this outdoor campout, but we expect to be able to use a bush area near Northcliffe. One objective will be to listen for **Ground Parrots** calling in the evenings, on heathy flats between Northcliffe and the coast. Some observers may join the campout after searching the Gingilip Swamps for waterbirds on September 6-7.

If you are interested in joining the campout, contact or leave a message for **Doug Watkins** at the RAOU Office. You will be notified about the meeting place and camp site as soon as possible. Please note that enthusiasm is the only ingredient needed for Ground Parrot searching!

Saturday, September 15: Avon Valley

Last year we went to Walyunga National Park and learnt that little bird data had been gathered for that Park. This year we propose to visit the scenic Avon Valley National Park and compile a bird list for the areas visited. A broad variety of bushbirds should be present, many of them breeding. If time is available we may also look for Shrike-tits in the powder-bark wandoo at Majestic Heights, Toodyay.

All interested persons should meet at 0800 at the intersection of the Toodyay (Red Hill) Road and Bunning Road at **Gidgegannup** (roughly 25 km from Midland), or at the nearest parking opportunity on the Toodyay side of this junction. This will be a full day outing; newcomers welcome as always.

CAMPOUT — Friday September 28 to Monday October 1: Dryandra Forest and Narrogin Lakes

RAOU members and friends will be joining the **WA Naturalists' Club** (but not the B.O.C.) at Dryandra Village on the long weekend this year. People should come self-sufficient for camping (some water may be available) although limited accommodation in Nissan huts could be available: check with Mike Southwell-Keely (Ph 295 1441) if you require this.

Dryandra Forest is renowned for its variety of woodland birds including Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens, Crested Shrike-tits, Malleefowls and raptors. Nesting could be in full swing at this time. Twelve open Canadian canoes have been hired and will be used on the Narrogin Lakes (e.g. Taarblin) on the Monday. The lakes support many breeding ducks (including Freckled Ducks), herons and egrets. A small fee will be required from those using the canoes.

Dryandra Forest is easily reached on bitumen road from North Bannister, via Wandering and Pumphrey's Bridge. The village is off the main road but is signposted. If you get to Narrogin you have gone too far. Most local people will know the area quite well.

Special Waterbird Survey No. 2 — Tuesday October 2: Beverley (Yenyening) Lakes

Following the Dryandra Campout, some observers will search the Beverley Lakes chain for nesting waterbirds. This wetland area is the subject of conflict between several interests and more bird data is needed to enable appropriate management decisions to be made.

Meet at 9.00 a.m. at the **Brookton Post Office**; the lakes are 25-30 km to the east. A convenient route back to Perth would be the Brookton Highway.

Sunday, October 14: Alfred Cove

This place is famous for its nesting Buff-banded Rails and Black-winged Stilts as well as hordes of waders including the oc-

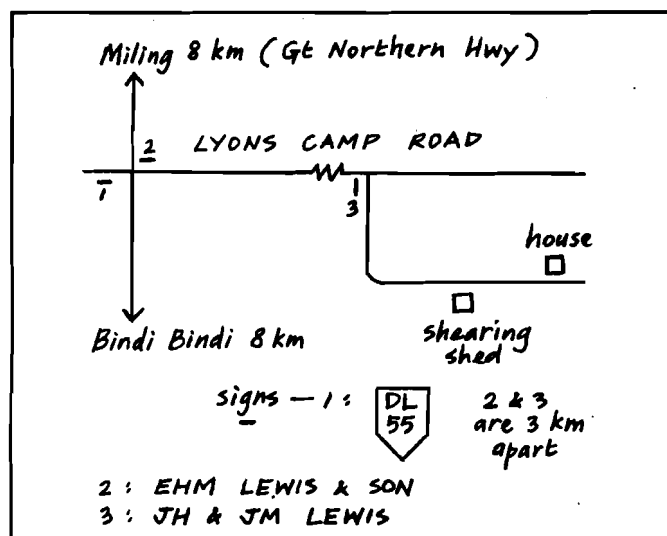
casional Terek Sandpiper, Sittellas and Tree Martins nest in the eucalypts in the parking area near Troy Park where observers should meet at 2.00 p.m. You might care to first join a B.Y.O. barbecue at 12 noon at the hill-top playground at Wireless Hill.

Weekend Camp - October 20-21: Miling, Moora, Wongan Hills

This campout will be based in the shearing shed at the property of J.H. & J.M. Lewis, about 8 km SE of Miling and 200 km North of Perth. Water, light, shelter and possibly a sheep on the spit on Saturday night, will be provided. Otherwise come self-sufficient (beds, food etc.); camping is permitted.

Saturday morning will be spent in an area 40 km north of the farm, where mulga bird species have been seen. The afternoon will see us investigating excellent wetlands west of Moora, also about 40 km from the farm.

Departure times from the farm will be 9.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. (Sat.) and 9.00 a.m. on Sunday for a return to Perth via Wongan Hills. Wildflowers will certainly be fantastic. **Organiser:** R. Van Delft, 364 6202.



Weekend Camp — November 3-4: Woodanilling

The highly successful 1983 visit to the woodland and lakes near Woodanilling will be repeated in similar fashion. **Ray Garstone** is happy to help us with his local knowledge and skills at nest-finding. Camp will be set up in the Woodanilling Sports Ground area, which is where we will assemble on Saturday November 3 at 9.00 a.m. and later at 2.00 p.m.

Special Waterbird Survey No. 3 — November 5-6: Muir Lakes Complex

The numerous wetlands in the Muir Lakes Nature Reserve are not well known by ornithologists. Observers interested in discovering what birds use these lakes and swamps should assemble at 10.00 a.m. at the north end of Lake Muir (near the culvert/bridge on Muir's Highway) on Monday, November 5. A bush camp will be set up on Monday night: bring gas cooking equipment and 'swamp clothing' in addition to your food and accommodation.

Weekend Camp — November 17-18: Karakin/Samphire/Gingin

Meet at 8.30 a.m. on Saturday, November 17 at the Moore River bridge on the Perth-Lancelin Highway (about one hour from Perth). We will look in coastal heath for the Emu-wren and Calamanthus and then count waterbirds at Karakin Lake (levels permitting).

Overnight camping area and water are available at Samphire Bird Sanctuary, Wanerie Road, West Gingin. Variety of bush and waterbirds (sometimes nesting spoonbills; Little Bittern). On Sunday meet at 9.00 a.m. on the Brand Highway at the left turn which is 2-3 km North of Bootine Road. If you hope to join us on the Sunday only, advise **Di Beckingham** on 381 9035.

Saturday, November 24: Woodman Point

Meet at 0800 at the most westerly car-parking area at Woodman Point. This is an important roost site for migratory waders.

Metro Bird Tally 1984: November 30 — December 1

This year's bird tally will emulate the 1983 event except that it will be limited to the area within a radius of 30 km from the G.P.O. It will run from 6.00 pm (1800) on Friday November 30, to 6.00 p.m. on the following Saturday (culminating in the Social night).

Those who would like to take part in the tally should contact **Ron Van Delft** at the R.A.O.U. office by November 20. A charge of \$2 per team will be made to cover postage of instructions and tally cards.

The objective of the tally is to record the bird species present in the metropolitan area within a twenty-four hour period, at a particular time of year.

ANNUAL SOCIAL NIGHT: Saturday December 1 — W.A.I.T.

Last year's social night was a huge success and we feel it's worth another round in the same format. The night will begin at 6.00 p.m. and will be an outdoor wine/nibbles/BBQ/fruit salad affair. Some prizes will be given out and results from the Bird Tally will be announced.

The cost per adult will be \$11.00 payable to the R.A.O.U. (send to R.A.O.U. office) by 15 November at the very latest. School age children will be admitted for \$6.00 per head.

The W.A.I.T. campus will again be the venue although you might need to follow our signs from the Kent Street (western) entrance in case we choose a different site to that used in 1983. Will you be amongst the revellers?

Sunday, December 16: lower Swan River valley

Details to be finalised in December newsletter, but probably meet at 0800 at the carpark in the Clarkson Reserve, off the end of Peninsula Rd., Maylands. Check with the R.A.O.U. Office.

Events in 1985

Unfortunately, no events for 1985 have been programmed in sufficient detail to announce here. We have, however, tentatively booked the Woodbury Boston facilities at Torbay for the long weekend of January 25-28, 1985. Please ring Di Beckingham on 381 9035 to give an indication of interest in participating.

MEETING REPORTS

May 7: Discussion Evening

More than 50 members and friends heard reports of bird study projects in W.A. **Shapelle McNee** presented data collected for the Australasian Shoveler by participants in the Waterbird Usage Study; **Mike Bamford** illustrated wader banding work and gave an analysis of some data from Pelican Point; **Graeme Folley** talked about Noisy Scrub-birds; and **Steve Keeling** discussed the Clamorous Reed Warbler and Little Grassbird with the use of sketches and data.

Ensuing discussion included the study projects as well as the Annual Bird Report, Atlas launch, book sales and excursions.

June 25: Mike Brooker — Kakadu

Brief reports and announcements from many sources revealed the healthy state of activities of the W.A. group to the 100+ people at this meeting. **Mike Brooker** spoke of monitoring of flora and fauna which he and others from C.S.I.R.O. undertook in the Kakadu National Park (N.T.). This region bears some similarities to parts of the Kimberley, many bird species being common to both areas. Fire plays an important role in woodland areas. These appear rather different in the wet and dry seasons.

August 6: Ground Parrots/Discussion

Geoff Shannon chaired this meeting of 65 people, at which **Barbara Hale** was elected chairman of the W.A. group of the R.A.O.U. **Doug Watkins** played recordings of calls of the Ground Parrot (J. Hutchinson's tape) and spoke of the results of his work and plans for the coming months. **Stephen Davies** explained the background to the pricing system for the Atlas and **Roger Jaensch** detailed three special waterbird survey efforts coming up in spring.

EXCURSION REPORTS

May 6: Neerabup National Park and swamps near the Yanchep Road

About 35 people braved the strong cold north-easterly winds to meet at Joondalup Lake and hope for improved weather conditions. A walk along the shores of Joondalup rewarded us with sightings of Australasian Shoveler, Great Egret, Sacred Ibis and other common waterfowl. A large number of Tree Martins were noticed roosting or hiding from the wind in a small patch of Typha.

The party then travelled onto the Neerabup National Park which is a fine example of open Tuart woodland. Strong winds and light rain meant very few species were seen, but the highlight was seeing a Pacific Heron flying south for the winter!

We then went onto Neerabup Swamp to examine the presence or absence of Argentine ants, as the swamp had been sprayed by the APB some months ago. Fortunately no Argentine ants were found. Observers dispersed around the swamp and some people had great fun tramping through the swamp, flushing birds for the birds relaxing on a high point near the swamp! Only Purple Swampheens were flushed, but the Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel were also noted hovering overhead. Overall it was an enjoyable day.

Thanks to Stephen Davies and Doug Watkins for leading us.

Ron Van Delft

June 9: Wannamal and Guraga Lakes

The limited area of safe parking space at Chittering Lake prevented our convoy of 17 cars (44 persons) from looking for Freckled Ducks at that wetland. Nevertheless, Wannamal Lake provided 16 species of waterbirds, including two Great Crested Grebes and 48 Blue-billed Ducks.

Bushbirds were active in the River Gums and Melaleucas beside Wannamal Lake. Highlights included calling Pallid Cuckoos, a shy Fan-tailed Cuckoo, three Sacred Kingfishers, Restless Flycatchers and a female Golden Whistler. A Barn Owl was flushed from a tree-hole and five regal Wedge-tailed Eagles drifted over the tree-tops.

After a sumptuous lunch in the balmy sunshine at Regan's Ford, the entourage assembled at the head of the firebreak leading to Guraga Lake. Being warned of the perils of the sandy track, most drivers reached the lake without difficulty.

Rafts of Hoary-headed Grebes, Musk Ducks and Blue-billed Ducks swam on the placid waters of the lake, while 15 Yellow-billed Spoonbills swept the shallows for small items of food. Unexpected inhabitants of the islets and spits included 19 Curlew Sandpipers, 41 Red-necked Stints and four Grey Plovers. A total of 21 species of waterbirds were seen as well as a variety of passerines in the Banksia/Acacia scrub.

The passage of a dozen vehicles had left the exit route in difficult condition, with the result that most vehicles became bogged while leaving the lake. Our thanks to the 4WD people who helped out, and apologies to those who were late for appointments as a result of their off-road experience!

Altogether one of the W.A. Group's most memorable excursions.

R.J.

July 6-9: Rottnest Retreat, 1984

A total of 42 urgent birders invaded Rotto from 6 to 9 July. After establishing a beachhead and securing an impressive quantity of provisions — vast rounds of bread and gallons of vino — we were off and running.

The following extracts are taken from the Rotto RAOU diary.

"I encountered extreme heights of emotional and physical transformation — better than Luna Park or Disneyland" M. Sharp.

"Damage Report — While serving above and beyond the call of duty on muttonbird patrol, Peter Watkins suffered a sprained ankle when he fell into a hole left by an inconsiderate muttonbird. Alas, no bird was found! Pete suffered on crutches for the whole weekend — grounded!"

"So now we've come to Rotto — we've come to join the quokkas just like other 'yobbo ockers', and we'll harass the snakes around these Rotto lakes, counting Phalaropes in scores — as we sleep — in spite of snores . . . We'll do it all, and more" Di Beckingham.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in what turned out to be another wonderful RAOU weekend. Particular mention must go to the R.I.B. education officer Tom Perrigo for his interest, not only in the future of the RAOU on the Island but also for arranging the video which enabled us to show the RSPB films 'Seabirds' and 'The Osprey'.

Thanks also to Shapelle McNee for all her work in getting people organized and Norma Duff and Di Beckingham who looked after the cleaning of the huts.

Special bird sightings on Rotto were a Sea-Eagle (Nicholas Dixon), a Hobby (Geoff Shannon), the Grey Fantail (Bill and Karen McRoberts), two Willie Wagtails (B. & K. McRoberts) and the Rainbow Bee-eater (Norma Duff). The Hobby was possibly a first for the Island. A total of 53 species was tallied from three days of observation, compared with 59 species from ten days in 1983.

P.S. Well done Geoff Shannon for enduring the sea-crossing, and thanks to Nick Dunlop for his talk on terns and for organizing the banding sessions.

S. Keeling

July 28: Bickley Brook

A gathering of about 50 people scored the slopes above the babbling brook, hoping to find or hear birds in the flowering heath. Stephen Davies and seven other experienced observers were able to point out 43 species to the many newcomers. Four species of cuckoo were recorded as well as both whistlers and three species of thornbill. Nesting appeared to be in the minds of the Magpie-larks and Grey Butcherbirds.

The highlight for the day was the discovery of two Southern Emu-wrens on the south slope of the valley. This diminutive species is rarely recorded from the Darling Scarp (eg. John Forrest), perhaps through lack of observations or lack of familiarity with the fine calls of this bird.

FROM YOUR COMMITTEE

1. New Chairman.

Nominations for the position of Chairman of the W.A. Group of the RAOU, left vacant by the resignation of Dr Stephen Davies, were called for at the June general meeting. The name of **Barbara Hale** was put forward and Barbara was duly elected at the August general meeting.

The committee and members of the W.A. Group wish Barbara every success in this role and offer her whatever means of support they can provide.

2. Staff at Eyre Bird Observatory.

Assistant Warden Jill Smith is temporarily absent due to requirements for the completion of her studies in N.S.W. Volunteer assistant wardens will fill this vacancy, viz. **Syd Baker, Tom Delaney and Rodney Vervest.**

New overnight fees are to apply: \$17 for RAOU members and \$20 for non-members. The Eyre Report for 1982 - 1983 is in advanced stages of preparation.

3. Membership.

The number of members of the RAOU in W.A. in July was **442** (possibly a little less due to non-renewals of subscriptions).

4. From Sub-committees.

Important recommendations of sub-committees, accepted by the General Committee included the following:

- an annual **subscription of \$6 p.a.** will be required in 1985 for receipt of *W.A. Bird Notes*: it was felt that members would recognize the value of this publication and appreciate the high costs of production (not to be met by the Waterbird Project after 1985);
- a **vetting committee** would consider all bird records to be published in the *1983 Bird Report for W.A.*;
- the **finances** of the W.A. Group are limited, and as such, no additional commitments of expenditure can be undertaken in the near future.

5. Noticeboards at Booragoon and Blue Gum Lakes.

Ron Van Delft and the City of Melville have produced display boards of waterbirds at these two metropolitan wetlands. Material can be readily altered and gives good publicity for the RAOU.

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

It was 16th June when I finally reached Eyre, having been delayed in U.K. by emigration bureaucracy. **Assistant Wardens Peter Higgins and Jill Smith** had arrived three weeks earlier and had benefitted greatly from their overlap period with Peter and Di Congreve. They learnt much of the routine operation of the establishment and also many of the idiosyncracies about which it can be vital to know.

During the long drive down from Perth with Peter and Di, towing their enormous removals-trailer, I was able to fire at them 101 questions concerning Eyre. Then there were just three hectic days of packing and load-carrying out to the Microwave Tower before we were waving **farewell** and wishing them a safe journey and a long, happy and less-demanding retirement at Beverley.

Since then it has been a period of **settling in** and reorganisation, with some minor repairs and improvements in and around the building and a fair amount of exploration of the observatory area. Excursions have been made to Twilight Cove, to the end of the east track and to Burnabbie Homestead and beyond. A party of five Ground Cuckoo-shrikes near Burnabbie were noteworthy.

Our **mist-netting** operations have been limited by a lack of poles and guy-cord, by one or more nets being on the mending-box throughout and not least by the wind and rain. The rain, of course, is always welcome and both our surface tanks are full, with several feet in the underground tank as well. We have used some of Peter's established net-sites, found several good new ones and several more fruitless ones: the haul to date is a meagre 48 banded and 24 retraps, with a Striated Pardalote being the most unusual capture.

Weekly **mallee transects** have been somewhat tentative as none of us are fully tuned in to the variety of calls that emanate from our passerine community. Nevertheless, we are learning fast and the extremely high-pitched contact note of the Chestnut Quail-thrushes is revealing that they are common in the areas of mallee that we have ventured into so far.

Undoubtedly the beach and the ocean have been the most productive habitats recently. The weekly count of 13.6 km of Kanidal Beach has produced very **few waders** as such. In breezy conditions on 9th July we recorded an all-time low count of just 13 Red-capped Plovers: presumably most had taken to the less wind-swept sand flats behind the shore dunes.

However, on 1st July near Nine-mile Hut, alongside four Crested Terns resting on the seaweed was an immature **Common Tern**, a new species for Eyre. Next day, returning from Twilight Cove, we found a freshly dead Antarctic Prion. A week later fresh onshore winds made **sea-watching** a profitable exercise, with five certain Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and many others too distant for positive identification, as well as a Southern Skua (**another new species** for Eyre) close inshore eating what later proved to

be a prion. Two further beach-washed prions were recovered, one Antarctic and one Slender-billed.

On 12th July another Southern Skua was seen. A Short-tailed Shearwater was swimming just beyond the surf and it occasionally flew around before eventually heading out to sea. A beach-washed Little Penguin was also found.

On 4th July I spotted a Little Eagle from the verandah, the first here for two years, when driving out on 7th Jill had prolonged views of a Malleefowl and when returning from Cocklebid-dy in fading light on 8th July, Peter and I had the good fortune to see 40 Dusky Wood-swallows clustering at their roosting tree.

It is too soon for us to comment on the abundance of **honeyeaters** though I suspect they are at a low ebb at present as very little eucalypt is in flower, but in some areas the trees are very heavily laden with bud, boding well for the spring and summer.

Last but not least, mention must be made of our new **solar energy unit**, which arrived in May, preceding all three of us. Its journey in from Madura along 60 km of hard track and 10 km of soft track took seven days, including nearly four days **bogged** down in sand in the newly-named 'Death Valley'. This necessitated summoning the expensive aid of a heavy Steiger tractor, which also managed to get stuck.

However, after much jacking-up, pushing, pulling and general perseverance, and some degree of rearrangement of our track, the unit was finally delivered. Installation was simple and we have much-appreciated **silent power** each evening, with only very minor teething problems. We hope everyone will come and see it for themselves.

There are **vacancies** on all the spring courses and plenty of quiet periods besides, so we are looking forward to welcoming everyone down here in due course. Why not give us a call?

Nick Dymond, Warden.

GROUND PARROTS

How is the Ground Parrot Study going? I knew you were going to ask that question, so read on.

The **first two months** of the project have now flown past. I have made two field trips and have been **successful** in locating Ground Parrots in Cape Arid National Park and in an area of Vacant Crown Land north of the Fitzgerald River National Park. Several other sites were visited but time spent at these sites was insufficient to yield results.

Field work to date has been of a preliminary nature with the intensive stage commencing in August. The **dates and areas of field work** are:

7 Aug — 15 Aug	Cape Arid to Hopetoun
19 Aug — 30 Aug	Albany to Walpole
3 Sept — 16 Sept	Walpole to Augusta
29 Sept — 21 Oct	Hopetoun to Albany
27 Oct — 3 Nov	East of Esperance

Specific sites and dates cannot be given because these depend on the results of the field work.

The most productive **method for locating Ground Parrots** is to listen just before dawn and after dusk for their calls. Their call is quite loud and distinctive. In Cape Arid National Park I heard at least 10 Ground Parrots calling while I stood at one spot. To assist members in the identification of the call, **a tape is being prepared**. On completion of the tape copies will be sent to all that are interested in doing some 'Ground Parroting'. Included with the tape will be details on how to maximize your chances of locating some Ground Parrots.

Although several remarks have been made about the size of **my ears**, they are limited in their ability to listen to all of the South Coast. The Ground Parrot Study needs your ears! (Cold?) If your ears are not doing much and the rest of your body is willing to go along, come and do some 'Ground Parroting' for a day or two.

Interested members can contact me by writing to or phoning the RAOU Office. I get back to it about every three weeks so I must apologise if some replies are delayed.

G.P.O. Watkins

The Atlas Launch

18 July 1984

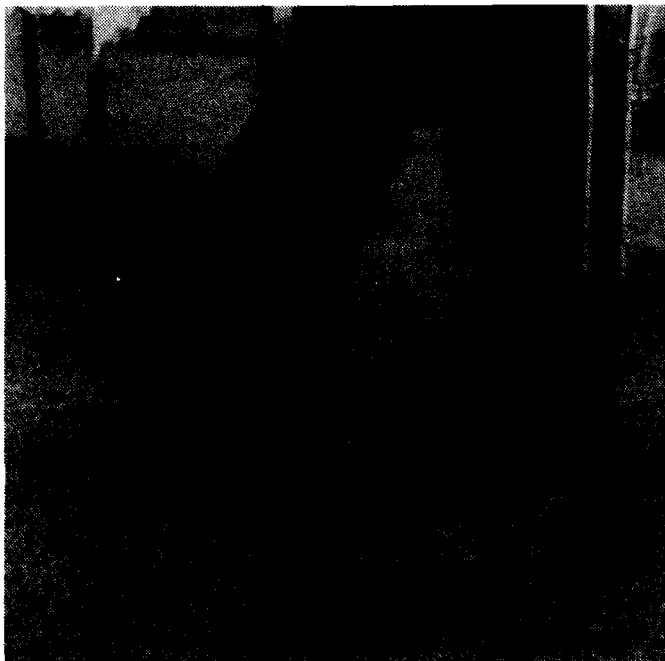
in the Undercroft of Winthrop Hall University of Western Australia



It was certainly a convivial occasion! Capable overseers of catering arrangements, John Malcolm and Diane Beckingham.



Immaculately posed: L to R, Dr. Stephen Davies, Wendy Davies, Mrs. Reid and the Governor, Professor Gordon Reid.



Physical disabilities did not prevent Atlassers from attending the Launch, a highlight in the annals of the W.A. Group of the R.A.O.U.



The expression is classical, even if the focus isn't! Peter Congreve and Edna Milne.

Refer also to a report in the RAOU National Newsletter.

Photos by R. Jaensch

METROPOLITAN BIRD PROJECT

The RAOU has been successful in getting Community Employment Programme (CEP) funds to **employ an officer for a year** to undertake the project described below. The Department of Fisheries and Wildlife and the Department of Conservation and Environment have included in their 84/85 budgets for approval by the State Government, sufficient money to make up the amount required as the sponsors' contributions under CEP project guidelines. Both Departments will know if the money is approved sometime during September. **The official starting date for the Project is the first week in October.**

Project Objectives

The project aims to increase public awareness and appreciation of birds in the Metropolitan Area by fulfilling the three main objectives listed below;

- (1) To produce **information** for use by tourists, teachers and the public which describes good birdwatching spots in the Metropolitan Area, including the metropolitan nature reserve system.
- (2) To produce a useful data bank on birds in the Metropolitan Area through the use of volunteers to undertake regular instantaneous point counts.
- (3) To have an **officer available** in the RAOU to lead metropolitan bird walks and provide local authorities with management information in regard to permanent bird walks and habitat preservation.

Project Activities

In order to fulfil the first objective, the officer employed by the CEP funds will be required to;

- (1) **Collate** all available information on birds in the Metropolitan Area.
- (2) Undertake and co-ordinate **field surveys** of appropriate areas.
- (3) **Liaise** with government and local government in matters pertaining to the development of permanent bird walks and appropriate public usage of reserves.
- (4) Produce appropriate **maps and text** for each good bird watching location.

To establish a useful and ongoing data bank on metropolitan birds, the officer will be required to follow the experience of the ATLAS and South West Waterbird projects. This involves;

- (1) seeking volunteers through publicity and personal contacts made whilst undertaking activities within the project. (eg. leading walks).
- (2) Providing training for inexperienced volunteers who wish to contribute to the project.

The activities required to fulfil the third project objective come within the scope of activities required for the first two objectives.

Photos

The project is trying to establish a **PHOTOGRAPHIC LIBRARY OF BIRD SPECIES**. Photos from the library will be used on descriptive **noticeboards**, in *W.A. Bird Notes* and other RAOU **publications** and will be available for use by RAOU members for specified projects. Booragoon and Blue Gum Lakes already have descriptive noticeboards maintained by the RAOU. It is intended that the photos used at Booragoon and Blue Gum Lakes will be changed as our library expands and the seasons change.

If you have any good bird photographs, the RAOU office would **love** to have a copy for our library. Slides, photos and negatives are all acceptable, but slides and negatives are preferable. Please send or bring your copies to our Canning Bridge Office as soon as possible! Sources will be **acknowledged**.

Information

One of the CEP project activities listed is to "collate all available information on birds in the Metropolitan Area". In other words we would like to know where your **FAVOURITE BIRDING SPOTS** are and **WHAT BIRDS** can be seen there. Please send this information to the RAOU Office at Canning Bridge.

If you are aware of any **ECOLOGICAL** or **BIRD STUDIES** undertaken at metropolitan sites please write and tell us, or better still, send us a copy. Currently this information is scattered and generally only known to those involved in the studies.

Knowledge of the importance of each birdwatching site in the Metropolitan Area should aid conservation of these areas. The project will eventually set up a **monitoring network** of volunteers to detect changes in bird species or numbers at important sites.

Birdo's Wanted

In a similar fashion to the Atlas and Waterbird Project, the Metropolitan Bird Project needs people to survey their **local parks**. Easy-to-use forms will be provided for all surveyors and a list of parks that need to be surveyed is being prepared. The first **mail-out** of information and survey sheets should occur in late October to early November.

Information from the surveys will be used to determine seasonal changes, bird diversity and the importance of each area for breeding, roosting or feeding.

If you would like to participate in this project by undertaking surveys please **contact** the RAOU office and leave your name.

Thanking you for your interest,

Ron Van Delft, Interim Contact.

WADER STUDY GROUP

July saw the end of our programme of **monthly wader counts**, and the first thing I would like to say is a big thank you to all the people who contributed to this. The results from this Australia-wide effort will be analysed at the Melbourne office, and it will be interesting to see what has come out of it all.

If you were involved in these counts and are now wondering what to do with the one or two days each month that you used to spend on them, take heart. The **biennial counts** (February and July) will still be going on, and for the rest of the year, organized records of wader numbers and species at particular sites could be kept for contribution to the **Bird Report**.

Banding activities will begin (have already begun?) in September and, as always, anyone is most welcome to participate. Information on dates and locations can be obtained either from the office (364 6202) or from me (w: 332 2468. h. 367 3032).

In addition to the metal bands which we put on waders, this year we will be using **coloured plastic bands**. The idea behind these is that the coloured band can be seen from a distance, and if one colour is used on birds caught at one site, then we will be able to get some handle on the subsequent movements of such birds. I hope that anyone who watches waders will keep a look-out for colour-banded birds. Who knows, while scouring that flock of Red-necked Stint or Curlew Sandpiper for colour-bands, you might spot the Broad-billed Sandpiper that you have always wanted to see.

The two colours that we will be using this season are **white and mauve**, and colour-banded birds will carry their colour band on the leg opposite to that with the metal band on. They should be quite easy to spot through binoculars or telescope, and I would be very interested to hear of any sightings. If you do make such an observation, please **record** date, location, species, colour of band and, if possible, whether the colour-band was on the left or right leg! Other information, such as an estimate of the number of birds bearing colour bands within a flock, would also be interesting.

In recent months, a group of people including assorted members of the wader study group, has been attempting to clean up several of the **wildlife reserves** on the Swan Estuary, especially Pelican Point and Alfred Cove. The afternoons spent picking up

rubbish have been liberally spiced with bird-watching, and so have been enjoyable affairs. Future dates for such events will be published in the *Bird Notes* and announced at meetings.

It is hoped to combine some of these clean-ups with counts carried out several times in a day and **simultaneously** at the three main estuary sites (Alfred Cove, Pelican Point and the Freeway Foreshore). The purpose of this is to try to get some understanding of how the waders are using these sites on a daily basis. We know that they move regularly between them, but it could be important to know why. The combined counts/clean-ups should provide something for everybody and, dare I say it, will effectively kill two birds with one stone.

Mike Bamford

COUNTRY BIRDING SPOT

In order to better serve the needs and interests of country members and travellers, we are introducing this new feature to *W.A. Bird Notes*. It is intended that it serves as a guide to **known good birding spots** in particular country districts. Hopefully, contributions from **local members** will be incorporated in this article in future issues.

ALBANY DISTRICT

Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve.

Access: Lower King Road from Albany and look for the signposted gravel road (LHS) about six km east of the bridge over the Kalgan River (ie. well before Nanarup). **Habitats:** low woodland, dense tall shrubland, extensive heathland, beaches, open shallow or deep lakes, rush-filled swamps. **Comments:** Take particular notice of fire restrictions and quarantine (dieback) areas.

Bird Highlights: Noisy Scrub-bird, Western Bristlebird and Western Whipbird, near main picnic areas; Australasian and Little Bitterns in rushy parts of the three lakes.

Oyster Harbour and Lower King and Kalgan Rivers.

Access: Emu Point boat ramp area, lower Kalgan bridge, Lower King Bridge. **Habitats:** tidal mudflats, samphire marsh, fringing paperbarks. **Comments:** best access to waders at high tide.

Bird highlights: Grey-tailed Tattlers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Large Sand Plovers, Red and Great Knots, Rock Parrots. See also Rushy Point in Princess Royal Harbour (Little Grove).

Porongorups National Park.

Access: from Chester Pass Road or Mt. Barker, signposted entries on north side of range. **Habitats:** woodland and forest, including karri.

Bird highlights: Crested Shrike-tit, Rufous Treecreeper, raptors, Red-winged Fairy-wren (isolated population?).

Lake Seppings.

Access: parking and walks off Golf Links Road. **Habitats:** open water fringed with rushes and thickets. **Comments:** some reed-birds at Middleton Road. First *Gallinago* snipe for South-West seen here, January 1984.

Bird highlights: Australasian Bittern, Buff-banded Rails, Rock Parrots, Red-eared Firetails. Note that one of the four specimens of the Lewin's Rail from W.A. is from 'King George Sound'.

Grasmere Lake Nature Reserve.

Access: Princess Royal Drive, left into Frenchman Bay Road, Turn right after railway crossing (to Bornholm/Torbay/Elleker); lake is approx 10 km to west, beside bitumen road. **Habitats:** shallow lake fringed with rushes and thickets. **Comments:** water levels variable, best birding when shallow.

Bird highlights: variety including Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Australasian Shoveler, Blue-billed Duck, Spotless Crane, Wood Sandpiper. Ospreys nest at Torbay Inlet.

Torbay area.

Access: continue past Grasmere Lake; take Hortins South/Torbay Hill road (LHS) or Cosy Corner Road (to beach, LHS). **Habitats:** beach, cliffs, low heath, patches of karri, pasture.

Comments: certain areas are privately owned - check with residents, or ask at Shire office in Albany; note fire restrictions.

Bird highlights: seabirds off West Cape Howe, Hooded Plovers on quiet beaches, Crested Shrike-tit in Karri. Ground Parrots in heath near Lake William(?).

The Editor would welcome any follow-up comments and suggested additions to these notes. What are the ten commonest birds around the city of Albany?

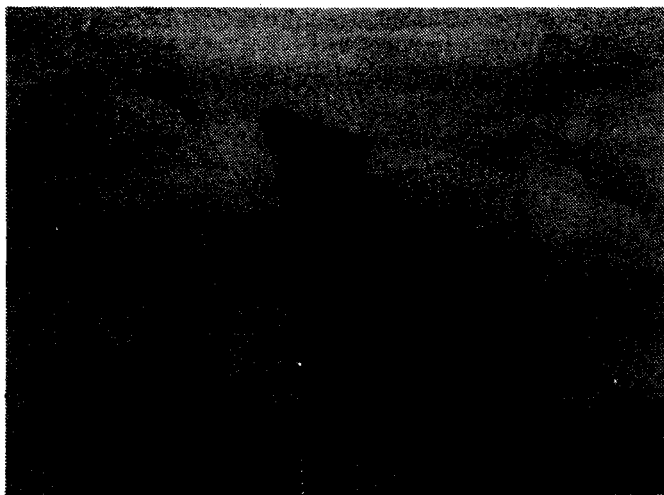
SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by Field Officer Roger Jaensch

1. Identification of darters and cormorants

Waterbirds placed in the order Pelecaniformes are characterised by a web uniting all four toes, which affords extra propulsion while swimming. Cormorant-like birds comprise 31 species within the order and are nearly **cosmopolitan** in distribution. Six of these 31 species occur in Australia including representatives from the three broad **sub-groups**, darters, true cormorants and shags (marine cormorants). In contrast, only two such species are regularly seen in Britain and most of Europe.

All six cormorant-types occur in Western Australia, although the marine Black-faced Cormorant is unlikely to be encountered at any wetlands under study in the Waterbird Project. Recent data from the Project gives a fair indication of **relative abundances** of the other five species.



The Great Cormorant is readily identified by its pale face and heavy style of flight. Booragoon Lake is one of its breeding strongholds in the South-West.

Species	Number of wetlands recorded from	Population in wetlands under study (based on monthly summaries)
Darter	32	47
Great Cormorant	36	183
Pied Cormorant	23	519
Little Black Cormorant	59	3335
Little Pied Cormorant	90	1192

It is not surprising to see that the Little Pied Cormorant has been the **most widespread** species. Perhaps its inferior population to that of the Little Black Cormorant is partly due to social organisation. Little Pies tend to be seen in small groups on every type of wetland including creeks and farm dams, whereas Little Blacks are more likely to occur in larger flocks at favoured feeding localities. Our study includes several prime habitats for Little Blacks but does not include many small creeks and no farm dams.

The Pied Cormorant is the **least widespread** species of cormorant in our study, being most often found in marine or estuarine environments. It has been recorded in 30 months since June 1981, but the most important wetlands (highest totals) for this species have been the Swan Estuary, Peel Inlet and Vasse Estuary (in 25 of the 30 months = 83%).

This raises the problem of **identification of black-and-white cormorants**. At inland waters, particularly where more than ten kilometres from the coast and less than 50 ha in area, the Pied Cormorant is unlikely to be seen. Pied Cormorants sometimes gather at large **inland** lakes but this phenomenon was not commonly reported for the South-West Division during the Field Atlas.

The following points of identification might prove useful for these birds in flight:

Species	extended neck	wing-beats
Pied Cormorant	Front-heavy effect; much white on sides of neck.	Slower than Little Pied
Little Pied Cormorant	In even proportion with wings and tail; more black on sides of neck than Pied.	Faster than Pied.
Darter (female-phase)	Long; very thin in comparison with wings and tail.	Stiff; glides interspersed with bursts of flapping.

Darters are more widespread than our data suggests. They frequent many rivers and small paperbark nesting swamps in the South-West which are not in our study. Adult females and males differ radically in appearance but this is **not adequately illustrated** in any standard text on identification of the birds of Australia. Pizzey's illustration is not incorrect but it does not display the rather **pied impression given by the female Darter**. Two unique characteristics of the Darter in flight are its long, broad tail and white-streaked back.

The Great Cormorant can be separated from the Little Black Cormorant by its bulky shape, **whitish face** and pale bill. Little Blacks do not have any pale markings on their heads, although their black bills might sometimes reflect light, appearing paler or greyish. Great Cormorants have a **heavier** style of flight than Little Blacks and often display white flank patches when in breeding condition.

2. Black-tailed Native-hens

The bantam-like Black-tailed Native-hen is one of a group of Australian birds which **breed prolifically in the inland after good rains and then irrupt to coastal regions as food runs out**. Other species exhibiting this strategy include the Crimson Chat and Letter-winged Kite.

Irruptions of Native-hens into the South-West have been recorded on **at least ten occasions** since settlement commenced. Ignoring the likelihood that some influxes were not widely reported in earlier years, a return period of 16 years can be calculated from published records (ref. Atlas).

The **last invasion** occurred between July 1982 and January 1983. Data from the Waterbird Project indicate few birds present (odd individuals only) before and after these dates. The largest concentration noted was 130 birds at Coomelberrup Lake (S of Dumbleyung), and the peak population for the study area was **369 birds** in September 1982. This was only a moderate irruption in comparison with the flocks of thousands that have

occasionally ravaged crops near Geraldton and elsewhere.

A prolonged period of useful rainfall in the Gascoyne and Murchison regions has probably provided breeding conditions for Native-hens in 1982. The Murchison was important for nesting by this species during the Field Atlas.

Observers have already reported the appearance of the few Black-tailed Native-hens at localities scattered across the **South-West in 1984** (see Interesting Waterbird Sightings). It seems likely that numbers will build and birds become widespread as northern breeding areas dry out.

Participants in the Waterbird Project should keep an eye out for Native-hens lurking in **wet thickets**, in shallows or even adjacent to wetlands in grassy areas. It is not unusual to see parties some distance from water. **Nesting** took place at a few wetlands in 1982: nest and eggs are reportedly similar to those of the Coot.

3. Information

Consult the *Coming Events Calendar* and *Coming Excursions* sections for details of survey periods and special surveys in 1984.

INTERESTING WATERBIRD SIGHTINGS

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. Dates are for 1984 unless otherwise indicated.

Great Crested Grebe	— 2, 2/6 Guraga (Dundaragan): NL. — 7, 20/6, Ninan (Wongan-Ballidu): NL. — 78, 12/8, Campion (Nungarin): NL.
Hoary-headed Grebe	— 150, 16/2, Eneminga (Dandaragan): NL.
Great Cormorant	— 1, 55 km E of Esperance ☆, 1/6 permanent swamp with <i>Typha</i> & <i>Baumea</i> rushes.
Australasian Bittern	— 2, 22/7, Drew L, near Beer-mullah ☆ (Gingin).
Glossy Ibis	— 21, 4/6, swamp SE of Robert Bay (Murray): NL. — 10, 19/7, Wild Horse Swamp (W. Arthur): NL.
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	— 1, 9/6, Ibis (Narrogin): NL. — 1, 23/6, Brown (Corrigin): NL. — 2, 29/6, Wittecarra Ck ☆ (Northampton): NL.
Chestnut Teal	— 1, 30/3, Moates (Albany): NL. — 3+, calling in rush and shrubs in swamp at The Lakes ☆ (Mundaring).
Blue-billed Duck	— 1 to 38, from 27/6 and through July & August: at single wetlands in the Shires of Esperance, Merredin, Quairading, Tammin, Brookton, Chittering, Gingin, Dandaragan and Northampton.
Spotless Crake	— 1, 29/7, Woodman Point (Metro).
Black-tailed Native-hen	— 12, 5/2, Cemetary Lake ☆ (L Grace). — 6, 4 adults & 2 immatures, 12/8, Brown (Nungarin): NL.
Sooty Oystercatcher	
Hooded Plover	

- Eastern Curlew — 1, 15/4, mouth of Preston R ☆ (Harvey).
- Marsh Sandpiper — 13, 29/3, Crackers (Dandargan): NL.
- Sharp-tailed Sandpiper — 107, 12 km NW of L Grace town, 4/1: at a small lake ☆.
- Silver Gull — up to 13, Billy & Bokan (Narrogin) in early June: NL. This species continues to spread in the Narrogin region.
- Little Grassbird — 1, 11/8, Kwolyin Rock (Bruce Rock): in *Typha* & *Bauma* at small soak; nearest SWWP record at Yenyening Lakes. The Atlas shows one record from the Goldfields.

(b) Uncommon or rare species

- Cattle Egret — 1, 13/6, swamp near Nicholson Road, Thornlie ☆, (Metro).
— 2, 29/6 & 3/7, 75 km E of Esperance ☆.
- 3, 24/5 - 30/6, Joondalup (Wanneroo). The Atlas records this species from 13 one degree blocks in the South-West.
- Little Egret — 1, 21/6, Joondalup: last seen May 1983.
- Freckled Duck — 1, 13/2, Noman's Lake (Narrogin).

(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 23 July 1984. New data = †.

- Great Crested Grebe — (102) — 28†, 9/6, Beermullah ☆ (Gingin).
- Great Egret — (269) — 17†, 9/6, Beermullah ☆.
- 14, 6/6, Alfred Cove (Metro): largest count for the two Swan Estuary reserves.
- Sacred Ibis — (239) — 50†, 15 km NE of Albany, 18/7.
- Straw-necked Ibis (5133) — 934, Alcoa Claypits, Baldivis, 18/6.
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill — (150) — 53, 20/5, Towerrinning (W. Arthur): previous max. count for SWWP = 55, Peel Inlet.
- 40†, 2/6, Guraga (Dandargan).
- Chestnut Teal — (432) — 200†, 31/10/83, 19 km NW of L Grace Town ☆.
- Australasian Shoveler — (2802) — 61†, 19/7, Capamaura Swamp (Coorow): highest count in Dongara region, SWWP.
- Blue-billed Duck — (1265) — 145†, 9/6, near Beermullah ☆, (Gingin): numbers low at other haunts in Gingin area this year.

(d) Breeding observations

- White-faced Heron — 17/6, nest with 2 eggs, Chandala (Chittering): all records bar one, are from the period August to November SWWP).
- Black Swan — 20/5, 3 broods of 1-2 weeks age, Chittering (Chittering).
- 24/5, cygnets at Toolibin Lake (Wickepin). Most breeding during SWWP has been from July to January.
- Red-necked Avocet — nests with eggs, winter, Ninan Lake (Wongan-Ballidu) and NE of Wallambin L (Mt Marshall).

- 6 + 3 runners, Marchagee Reserve (Coorow).
Appears to be breeding in many areas in '84.

(d) Interesting Dates

- Buff-banded Rail — recorded in every month of the year at Alfred Cove, eg. 2, 17/6; 1, 13/7.
- Over-wintering waders included:
- Ruddy Turnstone — 60, Wedge Island, 21/7.
- Grey-tailed Tattler — 1, 17/7, 'Amity' lagoon, Albany.
- Common Sandpiper — 2, 21/7, Joondalup (Wanneroo).
- Greenshank — 3, 29/7, Flagstaff (Woodanilling).
- Red Knot — 49, 13/7, Woodman Pt (Metro): two in partial breeding dress.
- Red-necked Stint — 9, Badjaling (Quairading), 11/8.
- Sanderling — 1, 3/8, Woodman Point.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

A. SOUTH-WEST

1. Laughing Turtle-Doves

On 8 June, 1984 I saw 40 doves flying quickly at the height of the tree canopies, through suburban gardens in Applecross. Not far behind, but not actively pursuing the doves was a large Collared Sparrowhawk.

I have noticed dashing flocks of Laughing Turtle-Doves on many occasions in winter in the metro area. If any observer has similar information, I would be interested to hear about it.

R.J.

2. Regent Parrot

John Hansen saw eight Regent Parrots in an area of *Casuarina* trees near Gingin on 20 July 1984. Have other observers seen this species in the Gingin district?

3. White-backed Swallow

Two were seen at an elevation of about 15 metres over Aberdeen Street, Perth City, on 29 July 1984. Are there many records of this species from the metro area in winter?

4. White-winged Fairy-wren

In early January 1984, Ray Hart saw several White-winged Fairy-wrens on the east side of Lake Goollelal (Wanneroo Shire). They were in cleared land with a few bushes over a period of three days. Accounts of this species at Swanbourne and Maylands appear in recent issues of this newsletter.

5. Red-eared Firetails

On 18 May 1984, while carrying out bird observations on Reserve 34934 near Albany, I saw a pair of firetails in severely burnt-out banksia woodland. They were extracting the seeds of sheoak *Allocasuarina fraseriana* which were being released from the cones as a result of the fire.

Ray Hart

6. Stubble Quail

One day in early March, I was surprised to find a Stubble Quail in the 'laundry court' of my house in Mosman Park. The court is enclosed but its two gates were open at the time. Was the bird an aviary escapee?

Catherine Edwards

7. South of Green Head Road (30/06, 114/59)

The following were seen by Mary Bremner on 2 June 1984, about two km from the coast: Australian Bustard (7 birds), Brown Songlark (2), Crimson Chat (5).

B. EUCLA

The following observations were sent in by Dion Hobcroft.

Shy Albatross Fresh beach derelict, mid February, near Israelite

Bay. Adult with CSIRO leg band. This is the only albatross to breed in Australian waters (eg. Albatross Island, Tasmania) and one banded bird was recovered near Yanchep, 2,800 km from its breeding area (ref. Atlas).

White-headed Petrel Beach derelict, Israelite Bay. The Atlas indicates a reporting rate of greater than 40% for this locality, but shows records for only two other one degree blocks in WA.

Painted Button-quail 40 km east of Esperance (Dunn's Rock Road), in heathland with *Melaleuca*.

Australian Bustard Up to 40, including first-year birds, on properties adjoining Cape Arid National Park. Estimated population in Esperance region of more than 200.

Scarlet-chested Parrot Three female-types on 26 January and a pair on 2 February, in the Balladonia region. Not recorded south of 30° in WA in the Atlas.

Pallid Cuckoo Very common in Esperance region from 14 May.

Red-eared Firetail 6, 40 km east of Esperance.

C. THE NORTH

1. **Mt Edgar Station** Jenny Harbisher reports large numbers of Spinifex Pigeons from this part of the Pilbara region, as well as the Blue-winged Kookaburra at waterholes. We are particularly keen to hear from observers at outlying localities.

2. A number of sightings made by Ken Mills while passing through the **Pilbara and Gascoyne** regions:

Snipe *Gallinago* sp. (5) and **Long-toed Stint** (1), on 8 February at a pool in the Sherlock River, near Roebourne.

Common Tern — Small parties of up to 30, early February, near Point Samson.

White-winged Tern — One at a claypan near Sandfire, 25 May 1984.

Little Tern — At Point Samson, 8.2.84.

Flock Pigeon — 100 feeding in spinifex, 7 February, near Goldsworthy.

Samphire Thornbill — 2, 21 May, at Lake Annean, near Meekatharra.

Pied Honeyeater — 1, 9.2.84, Minilya River.

3. North-East Kimberley Observations by Ken Mills.

Black Swan 1, 15 July, Parry Creek Lagoon near Wyndham. There are a few records for the Kimberley: this species has expanded its range northwards since 1951 (ref. Atlas).

Buff-banded Rail 2, 5 February, in samphire on the edge of flooded saline flats at Wyndham. Also one in rank grass bordering the sewage pond at Hall's Creek on 11 February. Status uncertain in Kimberley (Storr's *Birds of the Kimberley Division*).

Red-kneed Dotterel An unprecedented flock of 3,000, on a claypan in the Parry Creek area on 15 July 1984. The largest total national population, based on Wader Study Group counts, has been 1342 in February 1983.

Marsh Sandpiper (300) and **Black-tailed Godwit** (50) Unusually large over-wintering flocks, on a claypan in the Parry Creek area on 15 July.

EYRE COURSES

16-19 September: FIELD ORNITHOLOGY

28 October — 3 November: SHORE BIRDS

The Warden and Angela Jessop. 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. The course is an introduction to these confusing species, which can be studied in close proximity. Attempts will be made to capture and band birds using a cannon net.

LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES

Bibra Lake provides an excellent habitat in the wetland surrounds and dense grass and scrub thickets, for thousands of birds as well as fish and tortoises. Unfortunately, over the last few years, due to urban development, there have been great changes to its environment, with even more development planned in the future.

This metropolitan location is one of my favourites for bird-watching, and an excursion often has its surprises. Recently, a walkway-cycle track laid around the lake and we, carrying binoculars, have been walking the complete circuit for recreation. On several occasions (the first being in October 1983) I observed **Chestnut-breasted Mannikins** *Lonchura castaneothorax*, but as this bird's normal distribution is in the Kimberley region (and down the eastern coast of Australia), it was presumed that they were aviary escapees.

There had been heavy rain over the last weeks and in fact it was the wettest start to winter for a number of years. On the 20th May, having woken to a little break of sunny weather, we decided on an early morning jaunt around the walking track. At 8:15 a.m. in the vicinity of Bibra Drive and Parkway Road we stopped, astonished, as part of the dense swamp appeared to be alive with a large flock of Chestnuts. Every glittering reed and blade of grass wetted from recent rains seemed to be swaying with the weight of tiny birds as they climbed nimbly up and down the spikes. It really was a sight to be seen - reminiscent of sightings in the North-West.

We observed them for some time and I noted that the majority were immature birds - ranging from very recent nestlings to almost mature birds (approximately five immatures to one adult birds). On trying a count it was estimated their numbers were 120-150. From time to time, groups would take off in unison and fly up over and into the tree thickets which fringe the lake.

I had often thought that this particular spot, growing so much seed grass, would be ideal for finches. The Mannikins have certainly adapted well to the Bibra Lake environment and appear to have undergone a population explosion. It will be most interesting to see how many survive our cold southern winter.

Speculating again that this flock has bred from aviary escapees, we must realize that they could become a pest and compete with indigenous native birds for food - particularly in the breeding season when they also seek live food as well as seed. In some other parts of Australia where they have adapted to cultivation, they have been known to cause minor damage to crops.

After continuing our walk and returning to the spot a half hour later, we found that there was not a Chestnut-breasted Mannikin to be seen.

Kevin H. Coate

THE BITTERN

*Surprised by me, a bittern
Froze instantly in reedy pattern:
Bill stiffly thrusting skywards,
Feet clasping the trembling twigs,
Topaz eye fixed on me alone.*

*Though flesh would have flown
All the voices of its species
Commanded it to freeze,
While panic pulsed each artery
And wings were flinched to fly.*

*Cunning held me, tensely,
To have a clearer view,
And in a double tyranny
Instinct held it too.*

by D. Beckingham
(First published in Artlook).

NOTICES

1. Bird Watching at Perry Lakes — Volunteers Wanted.

If you have ever felt inspired to lead a group of interested people and introduce them to bird watching without going to a lot of effort, an opportunity awaits you. The RAOU will be leading walks around Perry Lakes on October 7, 14, 21 and 28 from 9 a.m. as part of the City of Perth's Partake-a-Park programme.

Relevant information on where to lead groups, species present along the walk and membership forms for potential new members will be provided for leaders by the Metropolitan Bird Project Officer. Please contact RON VAN DELFT on 364 6202 if you wish to Partake!

2. National Bird Week. September 14-24, 1984.

The idea of Bird Week is to promote the preservation and study of our nation's birds through greater public awareness. Exciting RAOU activities taking place during Bird Week include an excursion to the Avon Valley, raffling of Atlas vignettes, readings of poetry about birds and an evening of bird videos, as well as an RAOU meeting on the following Monday. There will also be radio interviews about bird study in WA on 6UWS FM throughout the week and a display in the WA Tourist Bureau.

What can you do? See if you can organise a display about birds in your local school or library. If you have any other ideas or if you want further information about the events mentioned, please ring Mandy Silberstein on 384 3185.

Poetry Readings, Wine and Cheese. You are invited to hear local poets read some of their own poems about Australian birds in the charming setting of Tom Collins' House, 9 Servetus Street, Swanbourne, on Sunday, 16th September, from 4-6 p.m. Admission \$3: reply to Dianne 381 9035 or Mandy if coming.

John Gould's Birthday, September 14 Cleve Jenkins will talk on John Gould and the Birds of Australia at 8.00 p.m. at the King's Park Board Room. This celebration of Gould's day of birth will be a joint Gould/League RAOU event. Devonshire teas will be served for a fee of \$2.00. Please notify Mandy by September 12 if you are interested in attending.

3. Royal Show.

Volunteers are wanted to man/person the RAOU publicity stall from September 29 to October 6. Contact Jack Donohoe on 450 2653. Remember: There's no business like show business!!

4. Dorrington's Bookshops.

Dorrington's wish to advise that discounts are not available for books on plants or gardening. Members might be interested to know about the Atlas book offer sent out by Dorringtons. A membership list was given to the bookshop so that RAOU members seeking discounts could be identified. Dorringtons were not authorised to use this list for a mail-out, though perhaps this was not made clear at the time.

5. Black and White Prints.

Black and white photographs of good contrast and sharpness are needed for a library of prints to use for the newsletter. Topics of interest are birds, bird habitats and bird-watchers in action. Sources will be acknowledged.

6. Congreve Retirement Fund.

The RAOU Office has received a number of generous donations for this fund. Could any person who still wishes to contribute to the retirement gift in appreciation of the work of the Congreve's at Eyre, please send their contributions as soon as is convenient.

7. Chestnut-breasted Mannikins.

The RAOU is asking members to keep note of numbers seen and localities of this exotic species in the South-West. See reports in earlier issues of WA Bird Notes. Send information to the WA Office.

8. Nest Record Scheme of the RAOU.

A recent workshop on this long-running scheme decided to introduce changes in scope and materials for nest recording. Broader

categories of breeding evidence may be recorded and the yellow cards are to be replaced by A4 sheets.

If you have been or wish to become involved in this scheme, contact the WA Office for supplies of the new materials.

9. Raptor Survey Scheme of the RAOU.

The Australasian Raptor Association has a simple survey scheme for counting birds of prey. This involves a steady drive (50 km/hr) on a set route (eg. 50 km), once each month on a fine day. Contact the WA Office if you can help with this.

10. Bird Observers Club of Victoria.

The BOC, PO Box 185, Nunawading 3131, Victoria, offers the following publications:

Australian Bird Watcher (quarterly journal) — \$7.00 p.a. posted.

Victorian Bird Report, 1982 — \$3.20 posted.

It also invites participation in its Australian Pelican Survey (sample of data sheet at WA Office).

11. Stick-nest Rats.

Peter Copley, Dept. Environment & Planning, GPO Box 1781, Adelaide 5001, SA, is looking for any information on location and condition of nests of the Stick-nest Rats *Leporillus conditor* & *L. apicalis*.

12. Bush-bird Banding

Interested persons are invited to assemble at the Mandurah Road entrance to Lake Cooloolungup (approximately 1 km south of the Dixon Rd. turnoff; ample parking space on opposite side of road) at 8.30 a.m. every fourth Saturday of each month to band bush birds, weather permitting. Enquiries to Stephen Ambrose (095) 27 7873 (home) or (09) 380 2227 (work).

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Sept. 6-7	— Special Waterbird Survey: Gingilup.
Sept. 8-9	— CAMPOUT: Northcliffe.
Sept. 8-16	— Period for regular waterbird surveys.
Sept. 14-24	— Bird Week:
Sept. 14	— John Gould talk, King's Park.
Sept. 15	— Day Trip: Avon Valley N.P.
Sept. 16	— Poetry Readings, Swanbourne.
Sept. 24	— Meeting: International Waterbird Research.
29/9-6/10	— Royal Show: RAOU stand.
29/9-1/10	— CAMPOUT: Dryandra.
Oct. 2	— Special Waterbird Survey: Beverley Lakes
Oct. 7,14,21,28	— Partake-a-Park walks, Perry Lakes.
Oct. 14	— Local Excursion: Alfred Cove.
Oct. 20-21	— Weekend at Miling/Moorra.
Nov. 3-11	— Period for regular waterbird surveys.
Nov. 3-4	— Weekend at Woodanilling.
Nov. 5-6	— Special Waterbird Survey: Muir Lakes.
Nov. 17-18	— Weekend at Karakin/W. Gingin
Nov. 24	— Local Excursion: Woodman Point.
30/11 - 1/12	— Metro Bird Tally.
Dec. 1	— ANNUAL SOCIAL NIGHT.
Dec. 16	— Local Excursion, lower Swan.
Jan. 14	— <i>Annual General Meeting.</i>
Jan. 25-28	— Campout at Torbay ?