



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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## BIRDING BY BOAT

### THE FIRST FREMANTLE TO SHELF BOAT TRIP IN SEARCH OF PELAGIC SEABIRDS

Very early on 23 September, thirteen intrepid members and friends embarked at the fishing boat harbour in Fremantle. This was an historic occasion to seek out our little-known offshore seabirds beyond the usual limits of observation. With the mercury heading for about 20°C and the swell rising to nearly half a metre, we were obviously going to need true grit to persevere with our seawatching and resist the temptation to stretch out in the balmy sun.

Undoubtedly, the highlights of the day were the noisy groups of young Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and Flesh-footed Shearwaters that fed a few metres from the boat, when we stopped some 12 miles (nautical ones, of course) and 100 fathoms (remember those?) west of Rottnest. The birds appeared out of an empty ocean as if by magic and they in turn attracted that full-time mugger of the high seas, the Great Skua. Least expected birds of the day were two Hutton's Shearwaters that wheeled and twisted south across our bow (pointy end) while we were about 1km NE of West End. I know of no previous sightings of live birds in Perth waters, but this adds evidence to the idea that *huttoni* regularly move down and around the west coast of the continent in late winter (see S.A. Halse, *EMU* 81:42-44).

Despite the high cost of a day's charter, the success of the day made it a memorable one. The trip would not have taken place if it had not been for Steve Keeling's persistence in drumming up support at short notice. Seabird-watching trips have been running from various eastern states centres for some time now and some of their 'good' days have brought forth an extraordinary range of exciting seabirds, many of which can be observed with stunning clarity and at point-blank range. Having now got out there and done it, I have no doubt this will be the first of many such trips.

Peter Curry

### OFF TO THE ABROLHOS

On the weekend of 27-28 October, nine intrepid birdos set out to discover the delights of Pelsart Island, a long narrow strip of coral rubble in the southern group of the Houtman Abrolhos. The trip began poorly with several people spending anxious hours driving around Geraldton in the small hours of the morning looking for the wharf (it's down by the ocean — you can't miss it!). Eventually all boarded the *Southern Lady* and attempted to



A nest of the Malleefowl was inspected during the campout with the Naturalists' Club, at Dryandra Forest.  
Photograph by Bert and Babs Wells.

catch a few hours sleep on her gently swaying deck.

Sleep was thwarted shortly before dawn by the roar of engines and, in some cases, a liberal dose of salt water, but the excitement of actually being on our way kept our spirits up. Attitudes changed slightly under the combined influence of a heavy southerly swell, diesel fumes and lack of sleep. After three hours at sea and then ten minutes in a dinghy, we were on Pelsart.

Birdlife observed included no less than seven Ospreys, a juvenile White-breasted Sea-Eagle with mum and dad and Common and Lesser Noddies. Fairy, Roseate, Bridled, Sooty, Crested and Caspian Terns, Spotless Crakes and assorted waders were also seen. All birds were remarkably friendly, and also notable for their tameness were the resident King's Skinks (*Egernia kingii*), which found our imported fruit scones much to their liking. Bridled Terns had to be pushed off the verandah of the shack we spent the night in!

The seas were kinder on the return voyage; or had we got our sea-legs? Seen between the islands and the mainland were Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, countless Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, White-faced Storm-Petrels and a probable Hutton's Shearwater. The bird-list for the trip contained only about 30 species, but all agreed that it was "quality stuff".

Mike Bamford

## COMING MEETINGS

Meetings commence at 8.00pm, although the meeting room is usually open from 7.30pm. It is often best to catch up with committee members and project officers **before** the meeting starts as they are more often inundated by the requests of members at the conclusion of meetings. **Visitors** are especially welcome.

### Monday, 14th January: Annual General Meeting.

This will be held at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, corner Selby Street and Pearson Drive at 8.00pm and it should be an interesting night for all. Note that all positions on the Committee for 1985 fall vacant at the AGM. Therefore **we need nominations** for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and six extra members.

Start thinking about who you would like to see on the Committee and come along to have your say on how the WA Group will run in 1985.

### Monday, 25th February: Special Meeting — Nick Dymond

Our Warden from Eyre Bird Observatory will speak about his experiences with observatories and wardening in the UK. The meeting will be held at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, commencing at 8.00pm. All welcome.

Unfortunately, topics and speakers have not been finalised for the two following meetings. We are also looking for a suitable venue. **Please check the March 1985 issue of this newsletter for details.**

### Monday 25th March:

This will be our normal March meeting and we hope to have another lucrative speaker to captivate the usual large crowd.

### Monday 6th May:

Discussion/Study meeting.

## COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

Excursions and campouts are directed toward both country and metropolitan localities and aim to provide experience in bird recognition and appreciation to both members and newcomers. Information gathered on the day is often used for specific management or educational purposes.

Interested newcomers are **always welcome** at any event and experienced birdwatchers are only too pleased to assist with identification of unfamiliar birds.

Codes MBP = part of the programme of the Metropolitan Bird Project, organised by Project Officer, Ron Van Delft.  
MBP/RAOU = joint excursion of MBP and RAOU.  
SWS = Special Waterbird Survey, organised by Field Officer, Roger Jaensch.

**Note:** Details for events after 10th March will appear in the March 1985 issue of this newsletter: look out for any changes.

### Sunday, December 9: Wanneroo Shire (MBP)

Meet at 2.00pm at Neil Hawkins Reserve, which is a picnic area near the Wanneroo Shire Offices beside Joondalup Lake. The MBP aims to promote awareness of birds in the metro area through monthly bird walks.

### Sunday, December 16: Lower Swan River Valley

Meet at 8.00am at the carpark in Clarkson Road (off the end of Peninsula Road, Maylands) nearest the city. We hope to see White-winged Fairy-wrens while looking at remnant wetlands in the Swan Valley.

### Sunday, January 13: Forrestdale Lake (MBP/RAOU)

Meet at 8.00am at the picnic area at the end of Moore Street (formerly at the end of Broome Street) in Forrestdale. We should see quite a few waders and possibly some crakes.

### Sunday, January 20: Lake Gwelup (MBP)

Meet at 2.00pm at the intersection of Lagonda Drive and March Street in Gwelup. Occasionally Little Egrets on this wetland.

### Friday, January 25-Monday, January 28: Torbay Campout

We return to the Woodbury-Boston Environmental School near Torbay Hill between Albany and Denmark. Our programme will probably be similar to that of 1984, but the birding in diverse habitats is always rewarding. **Please ring the Office to book a place, as this is essential.** The cost is \$12 and only food and sleeping bags need be taken as the hall is fully equipped and there are dormitories.

#### **Directions:**

FROM ALBANY — take the Elleker/Torbay road to Denmark. After Elleker and Cosy Corner Road turn **LEFT** on HORTINS SOUTH ROAD. Turn right at the first T-Junction and continue for a total of 3.5km from the Denmark road, ignoring two bitumen turnoffs to the right. At the top of the climb note the Woodbury-Boston sign.

FROM DENMARK — take the Torbay bitumen alternative route to Albany and find the Hortins South Road after Bornholm.

### Saturday, January 26: Wetlands of the Shire of Gingin

For those not travelling to Torbay, meet at 8.00am at the junction of the Brand Highway and Bamban Road, which is signposted on the highway about 10km south of Gingin. A great variety of birds occurs in this area, e.g. Darters, Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Blue-billed Ducks.

### Saturday, February 9: Kings Park and Pelican Point (MBP/RAOU)

Meet in the carpark overlooking the Narrows, west of the statue of Forrest, at 4.30pm. White-cheeked Honeyeaters and waders.

### Saturday, March 2-Sunday, March 3: Goodale Sanctuary Campout and McLarty or Mealup Lake

From Pinjarra, travel for approximately 6km southwards on the South-Western Highway, turning right into the **Old Bunbury Road** (bitumen). Follow the bitumen for approximately 10km to a crossroad which is signposted 'Herron Point' and 'Fisherman's Road': do not take either alternative but make a U-turn and retreat towards Pinjarra until you see the first (angled) gravel road on the left. Follow this road around a sharp bend, to the ridge with scrub on both sides. Look for the Sanctuary entrance on the right. If you cross an open plain you have gone too far. The campsite is in a cleared strip well into the scrub along the dirt track.

Campers need to be fully self-sufficient and should carry gas cooking equipment. Please respect this attractive bush area.

Rally at 0900 at the campsite for the organised activities on both days. A visit to the rich McLarty-Mealup area on Saturday should yield waders, herons and Regent Parrots, while the Sanctuary supports a vigorous breeding colony of Darters and an elusive Black Bittern.

### Sunday, March 10: Bibra and Yangebup Lakes

Always a popular excursion. Meet at 8.00am at the log-boat on the lawns on the western side of Bibra Lake.

### Sunday, March 30: Dumbleyung Lake (SWS)

Consult Roger Jaensch at RAOU office.

### Saturday, April 13: Whiteman Park, Caversham (MBP/RAOU)

### Saturday, April 20: Day boat trip to Continental Shelf

This excursion is run through the WA Seabird Group of the RAOU, but all are welcome. You must **book by March 20** at the RAOU office in WA. A booking fee of \$20 is required and the

total cost is expected to be about \$30. Of special interest will be those species which are present as a result of the plankton blooms which should occur at this time of year. Enquiries to Steve Keeling on 291 7592.

**Sunday, April 29: Cooloongup Lake**

**Sunday, May 5: John Forrest National Park**

**Monday, May 13: Peel Inlet (SWS)**

**Saturday, May 25: Chittering Valley**

## MEETING REPORTS

### **September 24: Roger Jaensch — Ornithology in Japan, England and The Netherlands**

Bird-watching in Japan is booming in popularity, and activities and sanctuaries are highly organised (e.g. rows of telescopes in hides). Wetlands are scarce but are used by small mobs of wintering ducks (e.g. Falcated Teal) and waders (e.g. Long-billed Plover). Impressive birds readily seen in the mountains and northern parts include the Brown Dipper, Mandarin Duck and Steller's Sea-Eagle. Wader banding is organised in Tokyo Bay and cranes are trapped on the south-western islands. The English language field guide is excellent and is available in Australia.

Hong Kong surprisingly offers a great deal for birdos. Blue Magpies and Violet Whistling-thrushes abound in the mainland parks, while impressive colonies of egrets and Pond-Herons, roosting waders (e.g. Spotted Redshank), marsh-birds and ducks (e.g. Garganey) can be observed near the Chinese border. The latest edition of the Hong Kong Bird Guide is very good.

Bird studies and reserves have long been established in England, so it should not be surprising that management of wetlands for waterbirds is quite advanced. Highlights of wetlands in The Netherlands include the vast Wadden Sea, and reed swamps managed for nesting by Curlews and Bitterns as well as thatch production. Black-tailed Godwits and Oystercatchers nest extensively in cow pastures!

## EXCURSION REPORTS

### **August 11: Herdsman Lake**

Stephen Davies was assisted by a number of experienced birdos in presenting the birds of Herdsman Lake to a crowd of 65, many from Stephen's course at UWA. Nearly 30 species were seen, including the Great Crested Grebe, Brown Goshawk, White-backed Swallow and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. Ducks, swans and Little Grassbirds were nesting.

### **August 18: Yanchep**

Forty-four species were noted by participants in this excursion, again led by Stephen Davies. Nesting by Purple Swamphens, Red Wattlebirds and Striated Pardalote was observed: trillers were also seen. The assemblage split into three groups to visit the banding station run by Geoff Shannon, Perry de Rebeira and Peter Watkins. Fifty-nine birds were caught, seven having been banded previously (up to three years ago). The catch included three Little Wattlebirds, two Western Spinebills and a Spotted Pardalote (first caught in the Park).

### **September 8-9: Northcliffe**

Foul weather hampered the faithful who listened, in vain, for Ground Parrots in the Windy Harbour-Broke Inlet region. Shearwaters and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses were spied off the lighthouse at Point D'Entrecasteaux and Purple-crowned Lorikeets could be heard in the misty canopies of karri at Mount Chudalup.

### **September 15: Avon National Park Excursion**

A group of about 30 people braved an adverse weather forecast to gather at Giddegannup before moving onto the National Park.



Shining Bronze-Cuckoos were observed on the Yanchep excursion and a juvenile was being fed by foster parents during the Woodanilling Campout.

Photograph by Geoff Shannon.

The day started well with a Pied Butcherbird calling near the assembly point, but the rest of the excursion constituted more glimpses than clear sightings. A 'young at heart' group descended the thousand feet from the park lookout to the river in search of different habitat and bird life, but was not rewarded in anything much but hard toil in the thousand feet climb up again. After lunch the party drove through the park down to the river where a number of waterbirds were seen. A total of 41 species was recorded.

### **September 28-October 1: Dryandra Campout**

This joint exercise with the Naturalists' Club proved most beneficial to all who participated, as knowledge about all aspects of natural history was gladly shared around. Exciting observations included the Crested Shrike-tit, Malleefowl (working its nest-mound), Bush Thick-knee (with one egg, near the camp), Peregrine Falcon and Tawny Frogmouth. Twelve canoes were launched in Taarblin and Toolbin Lakes on the Monday, providing a new birding experience for some and nesting Freckled Ducks for others. Thanks to the Southwell-Keelys for their invitation and organisation.

### **October 20-21: Miling Campout**

Although some considered the lamb-on-spit provided by Mr and Mrs Lewis to be the highlight of this happy campout, others were inspired by the wide range of birds seen. Black Honeyeaters were in force at a sandplain reserve north of Miling and hundreds of Black-tailed Native-hens scampered in and out of the Moora Swamps. Other birds seen at Moora, Wongan Hills or Lake Hinds included Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens and Budgerigars.

Many ducks at the Moora Swamps had young and breeding by White-faced Herons, Varied Sittellas and Australian Crakes (Mogumber) was also noticed. Our thanks to the Lewis family and Ron and Catherine Van Delft for their planning and for arranging the morning chorus of Pied Butcherbirds.

### **November 3-4: Woodanilling Campout**

Once again the prolific nature of the bird and plant life in this area amazed and delighted the 23 members who were led by Ray Garstone and Wayne Zadow. At least 34 breeding species were seen in the woodlands.

On Saturday on the Woodanilling Golf Course, Rifle Range and gravel pits we sighted 61 species and enjoyed seeing Regent and Elegant Parrots. By various means we climbed to giddy heights to look at fledglings of an Owlet-Nightjar and a Rufous Treecreeper in hollows. One large chick in the nest of a Brown Honeyeater appeared to be a Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo. On two occasions we observed the feeding of immature cuckoos by

foster parents: a Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo was being fed both by Scarlet and Red-capped Robins; a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was being fed by Yellow-rumped Thornbills.

As our group had become scattered at one stage, Ray needed to rally us together and captured a 1.5 metre Carpet Python as a drawcard. He held it by the tail until we all came up to stroke it in fascination. He then led us to the nest of a Painted Button-quail, where we saw the bird sitting on its four eggs in sedge about four metres away.

At night we listened to a tape recording of the Barking Owl's two-note call and also enjoyed seeing some of Ray's slides of nesting birds.

On Sunday Wayne gave us a grand tour of his property north of Kojonup, which provided us with these highlights: a Peregrine Falcon's nest with one of the young visible and both parent birds flying close-by; a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest with one young visible; a Tawny Frogmouth sitting on a stick nest; a Brown Songlark's grass nest with pinkish eggs; and a Jacky Winter's tiny nest with bluish eggs. We all had a long and close view of a Crested Shrike-tit feeding near its nest high overhead.

Everyone thoroughly appreciated the tremendous variety of sightings and observations of behaviour. Some of us followed nest-finding principles and found more nests on the early-morning walks. Learning more about raptors in particular was one of the spin-offs of this very special weekend, so we are most grateful to our leaders for their time and efforts.

D. Beckingham

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Observations of birds and mammals at Eyre during August to October have been exceptionally interesting, with not only a **startling run of State and Australian rarities** and a stream of unusual records for Eyre, but also one absolutely stunning day of visible migration.

On 8th August I found a male Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* on seaweed banks to the east of the observatory and it remained there until the 15th. Plumage characters point to its belonging to the race *macronyx*, which breeds in NE China, migrating into SE Asia for the northern winter: this race **has not previously been identified in Australia**. An abortive search for the wagtail on 18th August resulted in our finding a 3-metre long Weddell Seal on the same section of beach. Only the **second Australian occurrence** of this Antarctic species, it allowed close approach and appeared weak, but then it had swum a long way. It had recovered and disappeared into the ocean by next morning.

Both a drake Chestnut Teal on 12th August and a Square-tailed Kite on 19th August were first confirmed records for Eyre and there were further sightings of Square-tails on 19th September, 10th and 20th October. A **Little Stint** on 18th September during the Field Ornithology Course, was another first for Eyre and two Arctic Terns on 20th and a Common Tern on 23rd were of rarity status.

Days like **7th October** are very few and far between. It was a fine, warm morning with a fresh northerly wind when I set off with Tom Delaney, the temporary assistant warden, and five visitors to carry out the regular beach count from Eyre to Nine Mile Hut and on to Twilight Cove. A juvenile Red-capped Robin on the fore-dune was the first surprise, followed by an unusual scattering of Brown Songlarks and Richard's Pipits. Then a Black-tailed Native-hen strutted off the seaweed into the fore-dunes, a first record for Eyre.

Continuing westwards we saw a flock of 20 Crimson Chats on the flats behind the fore-dunes, then another flock, then still more shrub-hopping eastwards and soon a **steady stream of chats** was on the move. By the time we stopped at Nine Mile Hut to quench our thirst we had counted over 500 Crimson Chats. Suddenly we noticed an increasing chorus of penetrating calls, and looking up we were amazed to see a towering, swirling mass of woodswallows, stretching upwards and northwards as far as we could see. They were Masked Woodswallows and we estimated the flock to be of the order of 5,000: they gradually drifted away to the north east. Crimson Chats were now moving through in a broad, continuous stream at and just above shrub level and Tree Martins were quite numerous too.

We piled into the two vehicles and headed through the coastal mallee on the track to Twilight Cove. More Masked Woodswallows flew east (300, 800, 200, and so on), wave after wave after wave, with Crimson Chats in droves and droves buzzing their way across the mallee past us. As if we were not already lucky enough to be in the thick of an avian spectacular, a Malleefowl flushed from the side of the track and **eventually flew 100 metres** before dropping back into the mallee!

Eyre scarcities such as Great Egret, Whimbrel and Australian Shelduck were by the way before we reached the shade of Twilight Cove to shake off the windblown sand, relax, eat, drink and muse over our good fortune. Still the **waves of woodswallows** passed east, high over the cliff-tops. By the time we made the return trip to Eyre in late afternoon we were amongst the tail-end of the movement, with small groups of woodswallows alighting in the mallee and loose flocks of chats feeding on the ground among the shrubs.

Back at the observatory Peter Higgins had not seen a single Masked Woodswallow all day and only a handful of Crimson Chats, so clearly the main movement had headed north east from Nine Mile, but he did count 250+ Tree Martins and a single Fairy Martin. Conservative estimates at 10,000+ Masked Woodswallows and 3,000+ Crimson Chats, together with **74 other species**, were entered in the Daily Log that evening!

The wreck of **seabirds** experienced in the South-West in early August did not occur at Eyre. A single Kerguelen Petrel on 4th, a new record for Eyre, and three prions on 10th August were the only corpses found on 20km of beach during the first half of the month. There were three beach-washed Great-winged Petrels around the end of August to early September, a White-headed Petrel on 2nd October and an Antarctic Fulmar on 24th October, the latter being yet another new record for Eyre.

The monthly totals of species recorded in the observatory area are an interesting representation of the change of the seasons at Eyre: 72 in June, 91 in July, 105 in August, 111 in September and 129 in October.

We get few opportunities to travel out of the observatory area, but on 13th October a visitor was catching a morning bus at Cocklebidy and Tom Delaney and his wife were catching the bus back to Perth in the afternoon, so we had several hours north of the highway on Arubiddy Station. This was true Nullarbor Plain, with a lush growth of grass and perennial flowers after the plentiful rains of late winter. Blending superbly into the sea of waving grass we found a group of three Little Curlews, a vast distance south of their usual range.

Nick Dymond

## WADER STUDY GROUP REPORT

With the arrival of large numbers of waders in September and October, the busy time for the Wader Study Group began. Despite a slow start on the local banding front, we have been out to Pelican Point several times and hope to visit this site **once or twice each month** throughout the season. Birds banded at Pelican Point will receive a **coloured plastic band** (white or mauve) in addition to the numbered metal band, as mentioned in the previous *Bird Notes*, and we would most definitely like to know of sightings of such birds. As usual, anyone is welcome to join us on our banding nights.

In addition to banding at Pelican Point, we hope to cross to **Rottneest** to band birds there and get some idea of movements between the mainland and the island. Hopefully we will be able to tie in these trips with the bird walks being organised by Steve Keeling on Rottneest.

On a rather grander scale, yet another **North-West wader study trip** is being organised, this time to run from **March 23 to April 20 1985**. As with previous trips, this will involve banding and counting in the Port Hedland/Eighty Mile Beach/Broome region. Information about this trip will be contained in the December *RAOU Newsletter*, but interested people should contact the office to get detailed information on how things will be organised. A **small bus** will be hired to transport some people from Perth, but private vehicles and especially Four-Wheel Drives are desperately needed to ease transport problems.

Just in case banding isn't your interest and the North-West trip is beyond you, there are also several planned wader counts which need volunteers. Over the past four years, Australia-wide counts have been carried out in Summer and Winter, and the last two such counts are coming up. The weekends to remember are **February 9-10 and 16-17, and June 29-30 and July 6-7**. In addition to these counts, an intensive period of counting is planned for the period from late February to late April, to monitor the northward migration of waders in late summer. This will involve weekly counts at prime sites. Further information will be contained in the December *RAOU Newsletter* and will be sent to past counters when they receive the report on the last winter count.

The increased counting activity coming up should be really worthwhile and hopefully won't be so intense as to take the fun out of it all. For sites near Perth, and possibly further afield, it would be possible to get several people to share the counting so that one person doesn't have to go every weekend.

The final bit of news on the wader scene takes us back to **Pelican Point**. Together with Alfred Cove and the Freeway Foreshore, this is a very important wader site and moves are being made to ensure that this complex will continue to be used by the birds. Pelican Point in particular needs some attention, and work planned includes improved fencing and a new self-closing gate to keep stray dogs out, signposting to tell people why it is important, and a track to guide people to the best points to view birds from and away from areas where they may disturb them. The National Parks Authority may be able to provide the materials but the total cost may prove too much if savings can't be made somewhere. One way in which money can be saved on this project is on labour, and **volunteers** capable of wielding a spade or pushing a wheelbarrow will be sought when the time comes. With enough of us it shouldn't be too much hard work and will hopefully preserve Pelican Point for the birds and make it more pleasant for bird-watchers.

Watch this space for details.

Mike Bamford

## ANNUAL BIRD REPORT

### Request for Information

Following good rains throughout the Murchison and Gascoyne regions over the past 9 months, conditions for breeding have been extremely good. I have had reports of **Black and Pied Honeyeaters** breeding from large parts of this area. There is already evidence of movement of birds out of this area as it begins to dry up. The sorts of birds we can expect to see in the South-West of the State include Black-tailed Native-hens and various wood-swallows, especially Masked and White-breasted. We can expect to frequently see Crimson Chats and one needs to watch out for Orange Chats. I think records of Black and Pied Honeyeaters might well come from regions where they have not been seen for some years.

I think this could be an interesting irruption and it would be nice to have it well documented for the future. For this reason I encourage people to take note of these birds and to send notes in. These records can be used either in the Annual Bird Report, or if there are enough, possibly a paper on the irruption of birds into the South-West of the State might make interesting reading.

### Annual Bird Report

Work on the 1983 report is well under way and I am pleased to say that we have many more reports than we did for the 1982 report. Records for 1984 are already arriving. The work load is now becoming quite large and I would appreciate it if further reports can be sent in **on the proper forms or on large A4 sheets of paper**. This makes filing and handling much easier.

As far as the sheets are concerned, there is no need to use the RAOU number. I am still receiving some localities which I cannot find in the *Traveller's Atlas* and so would appreciate people using a local name but then clarifying this with some land-mark that occurs in the index of the Atlas.

There is another area in which you could be of tremendous help to me, and that is placing your records **in the correct sequence** as occurs in the 1982 report. Of more help still would be to put all records of the same species together, but I realise that some of you do not have time for this. I look forward to receiving your records with interest. Good birding.

Geoff Shannon, 29 Waldemar Street, Gwelup 6021.

## GROUND PARROT PROJECT

It is now December and the Ground Parrot Project is in the **writing-up stage**. Eight field trips have been made to the South Coast, ranging in length from three to 17 days. Thanks to a large number of members, we have been able to "work" more than **50 sites** for Ground Parrots. While the weather has made work difficult at times, enthusiasm has remained high.

What have we found? Ground Parrots have been located in a limited area in **Cape Arid National Park**, a limited area in **Fitzgerald River National Park** and at several locations in an area of **Vacant Crown Land** immediately to the north of the Fitzgerald River National Park. The number of Ground Parrots found at one site has varied from one to ten birds. About 50 other sites were "worked" without success.

We have found Ground Parrots quite easy to hear — if you are in the right spot! On almost all successful evenings, Ground Parrots have **called between 25 minutes and 45 minutes after sunset**. Other birds stop calling around 30-35 minutes after sunset. In the morning, Ground Parrots are the first to call and this lasts for only 10-15 minutes. This is less intense than evening calling. Listening in the morning is difficult for two reasons. Firstly, you have to get up around 0345 in October, and secondly, Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters are very noisy at that time.

On two occasions in the project, Ground Parrots have been heard calling during the day, but on each occasion only one call was made. This made it very difficult to be sure that the calls were made by Ground Parrots, almost impossible if the observers had not been familiar with the parrot's calls.

To actually see a Ground Parrot takes a lot of luck or a lot of work (some people say both). Several sightings have been made during the project and most of these have resulted from **days of trudging** through suitable vegetation. Luck prevailed on one occasion where a Ground Parrot was calling during the day (i.e. about once an hour). This enabled Keith Bradby and I to approximate its position, walk to it, then wait till it called again. It did — only 25 metres from us. We simply walked towards the spot and up it flew — a beautiful deep green parrot. It swiftly zig-zagged on shallow, fast wing beats low over the heath and dropped down about 150 metres in front of us. We were lucky!

Though this project is nearing completion, **our knowledge is still limited**. Do get in touch with the office if you would like to know where you can go to hear Ground Parrots. Any effort you can put into listening or looking will be of value. We need to increase our knowledge of this species in WA if we are to be sure that appropriate management techniques are being used in the areas where Ground Parrots still exist.

Doug Watkins

## METROPOLITAN BIRD PROJECT

The project has got off to a successful start, despite the delay in producing "*Metro Birding Kits*". It seems that doing monthly surveys of local parks was already a popular pastime amongst our members! You can still join our growing network of observers by contacting the office.

Current project activities include:

- arranging one metropolitan **bird walk** per month. Members are welcome, but may be asked to help new birders! Some walks are joint RAOU/bird project walks.
- creating **display boards** for shopping centre and library displays. Particular thanks go to Mr H. Jonker who designed and made the display board frames.

- writing the **computer programme**. This aspect may dominate time during the next month. Members familiar with PASCAL programming are urged to contact the office.
- general activities such as publicity, administration and office duties. Many thanks to the numerous **office volunteers** who have helped the project get off to a quick start.

A special thank you to Graeme Chapman, Ian Edgar, Peel Howden, Roger Jaensch, Murray Unkovich and Peter Wilmot, who kindly donated their hard earned **slides** to the RAOU. The next newsletter will detail bird species which we are missing.

Unfortunately RAOU members are not distributed evenly throughout Perth, resulting in important reserves needing people. If you don't mind travelling 5-15kms to your metro birding site each month (or two months) please contact me at the office.

I am looking forward to receiving and analysing all the data that comes in.

Happy birding.

Ron Van Delft

## SOUTH WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

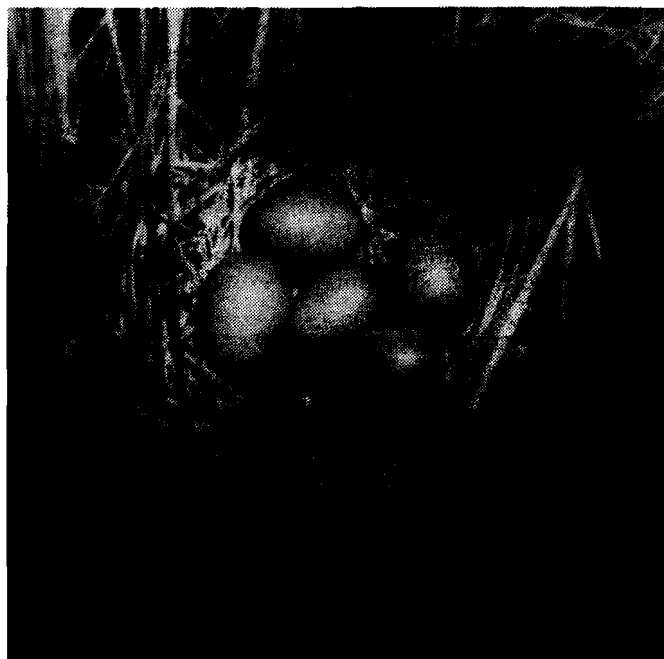
Report by Field Officer — Roger Jaensch

### 1. Breeding Records

Although the Project is concentrating on the **counting** of waterbirds using nature reserves, it also aims to collect breeding information in simple form. While searching for nests **should not detract** from the primary objective of obtaining thorough counts of waterbirds, additional time spent looking for nests can provide invaluable data. The value of many wetland nature reserves as breeding areas is not known, so certainly any nests or young that you 'stumble upon' are worth reporting.

### 2. Nesting by Crakes and Rails

If a wetland contains patches of dense inundated vegetation (e.g. rushes, tussocks, thickets of low shrubs), you can usually assume that at least one crane or rail is lurking therein. You might be fortunate to flush a crane or rail while wading through this type of wetland, but if the going is slow (too deep or thick), the cranes or rails will probably have time to scurry ahead of you (hidden), rather than flying.



The glossy olive-brown eggs of the Baillon's Crane are sometimes laid in small tussocks of fine rush growing within small, flooded shrubs. Photograph by Roger Jaensch.

The most productive situation for viewing cranes is clear edges of beds of rush which have become muddy due to falling water-levels. However, a surprisingly **useful method for recording cranes** at times of higher water-levels is to locate their nests!

Admittedly, some experience is helpful in such an exercise, but if you can identify a habitat likely to be productive, **careful** and persistent searching could bring rewarding results. Of course, disturbance to nesting birds must be minimised: this can be achieved by taking care not to trample sites likely to contain nests — just peer in! Remember that **ravens** are cunning, thieving birds and they might be attracted to investigate damaged vegetation.

Bearing in mind the great variety of habitats in our wetlands and the ability of birds to behave in 'uncharacteristic' fashion now and then, the following notes may be useful:

#### (a) In general

- most cranes lay their eggs soon after water-levels begin to fall;
- cranes and rails have no difficulty in moving about in **deep water** (they swim well);
- many nests are *not* placed in the middle, but often near the edges of dense cover;
- familiarity with **calls** is useful: calling birds at least encourage you to search!;
- breeding by cranes and rails in the South West tends to occur from September to January (latest on the South Coast);
- nests of these birds are generally shallow bowls, often neatly shaped but sometimes just local material twisted into place: in size, smaller than your cupped hand;
- if you find a nest with eggs, **describe** the colour and pattern of the eggs on your data sheet and I'll attempt to identify them;
- young **leave the nest** soon after hatching, and are initially all black.

#### (b) Buff-banded Rail

- may nest on dry land (e.g. in crops);
- in swamps, it often places its nest in the middle of a small shrub which has **fine rush** growing thickly through it;
- eggs are whitish or cream, with heavy reddish and faint mauve spots.

#### (c) Baillon's Crane

- one of the **earliest** nesters — active nests rarely encountered after early October;
- nests in '**exposed**' sites such as small isolated tussocks or small spindly shrubs with a light growth of rush;
- often nests in **temporary** wetlands such as roadside ponds;
- eggs are dark olive-brown, un-marked.

#### (d) Australian Crane

- prefers to nest at the **edge** of an area of suitable habitat, often in isolated plants or clumps;
- most often recorded breeding outside the high rainfall districts;
- eggs are light green-brown with prominent brown spots.

#### (e) Spotless Crane

- often a **late-nesting** species;
- prefers to nest deep in a bed of tall rushes or a flooded shrub-thicket;
- occurs mainly in **permanent** wetlands (or at least regularly inundated for eight months of the year);
- may use dry nest material, giving the impression that the newly-built nest is 'old', e.g. in *Typha*;
- eggs are basically buff or fawn in colour with fine freckles (same colour) all over.

### 3. Identification of Fresh-Water Waders

Waders, particularly those species which visit us from Asia, can be perplexing — even to experienced observers. However, please do try to identify any seen and **note the reasons for your identification** on the data sheet. These notes will then assist me if you're not sure as to what the birds are. At least

record the relative sizes of the birds and mark your count as "unidentified small waders" 835 uiwr, if you are unsure.

The following points could be useful to remember for these confusing pairs of species.

(a) **Wood Sandpiper (WooS)/Common Sandpiper (ComS)**

- WooS usually has heavily spotted upperparts, unlike ComS.
- WooS has a **white rump** in flight: this is partly dark on the ComS.
- WooS has no **wing bar**, ComS has an obvious bar.

(b) **Greenshank (Gank)/Marsh Sandpiper (MarS)**

- Gank has slightly up-turned bill; bill is straight and finer on MarS.
- Gank usually utters a **three-syllable call**, MarS typically has a one-syllable call.
- MarS has more yellowish legs than Gank.
- Gank is almost **stilt-size**; MarS is much less than stilt-size.

(c) **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (ShtS)/Pectoral Sandpiper (PecS)**

- ShtS has streaks on undertail coverts, unlike PecS.
- PecS has blackish line from bill to eye **but not beyond**; ShtS has brownish band right through the eye.
- ShtS has bubbling/chuckling calls; PecS has harsh "Krrupp" call or similar trill.

(d) **Red-necked Stint (RenS)/Long-toed Stint (LotS)**

- RenS has black legs; LotS has **yellowish legs**.
- LotS is generally browner than RenS, especially in spring and early summer.
- LotS has fine **trilling call** "Trrt-trrt-trrt-" usually given in its twisting, high-rising flight, RenS has less distinctive "chit-chit" calls.

4. **Gingilup Swamps Survey: 6-7 September 1984**

Our hardy team of ten observers struggled to come to grips with the Gingilup Swamps but did at least gain a **useful knowledge** of their access points and habitats. Much of the seasonal swamp-land was **in flood**, so the freshly-arrived water held little food for waterbirds. However, we were surprised to record Clamorous Reed-Warblers calling in the flooded heath and inundated *Banksia* thickets.

The most productive (central) area was only reached by myself, late on the last afternoon. A large stand of tall, mature paperbarks was inspected and the extensive *Melaleuca* thickets and *Baumea* rush swamps surrounding it yielded a calling Little Bittern, the **earliest spring record** in our Project.

5. **Beverley Lakes Survey: 2nd October 1984**

Observers came from Popanyinning, Pingelly, Perth, Narrogin, Mundaring and Beverley to census waterbirds at this **15km chain of lakes**. Three canoes and two outboards were put to good use, with more than 80% of the wetland area being covered on the day.

The total number of birds counted was not high, but the species tally (27) boosted the list of species for these lakes to 39. Among the **seven new species** were the Great Egret, Pied Cormorant, Great-Crested Grebe and Red-necked Stint. This list **compares favourably** with lists for other frequently surveyed wetlands in the region, e.g. Toolibin Lake (38 species). Two new breeding species added were the White-faced Heron and the Spotless Crake: Spotless Crakes are rarely noted in the wheatbelt.

The Beverley Lakes present difficulties for observers in their great size and variable conditions, so our information will be of great value to the authorities managing this area.

6. **Muir Lakes Survey: 5-6th November 1984**

Despite wind and rain throughout, our small band visited ten wetlands in this interesting complex. **Savage fires** had altered the vegetation of Tordit-Garrup and Poorginup Lakes, where two Great Crested Grebes were the only highlight. Surveys of similar wetlands in the Project suggest that Bitterns leave wetlands that have recently been partly burnt — even if prior to the nesting season.

A concerted search of **Lake Muir** itself revealed a flock of Whiskered Terns and about 1,000 teal, Pacific Black Ducks and Shovelers at the western end. Five wetlands, each different in character, were inspected in the **Unicup Reserve**. Birds were scarce, but for some Pacific Herons and Great Egrets. Kulunilup Lake once more held Australasian (2) and Little (3) Bitterns, but the low intensity of calling suggested that nesting was not yet underway.

The participants in all three special surveys are to be congratulated for their enthusiasm.

7. **Alcoa Clay Pits, Baldiavis (Wellard)**

On 3 November, a small troupe of RAOU members planted rushes around the rehabilitated clay-extraction pit at Baldiavis. Alcoa are keen to involve the RAOU in the development of this project and will provide **lunch and refreshments** to any group that assist with planting exercises (contact Roger at the RAOU Office if interested).

Fencing-off of planted areas will shortly be completed and plans have been formulated for provision of **shallow-flooded pasture areas** throughout summer. Some 25 species of waterbird have been listed by RAOU observers, including the Straw-necked Ibis (max. of 934 in June), Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Ruddy Turnstone and Marsh Sandpiper.

8. **Bittern Tapes Available**

I have posted tape-recordings of calls of the Little and Australasian Bitterns and Spotless Crakes to observers in strategic locations. If you would like a tape, please let me know **immediately**.

Don't forget to **listen at dusk** for the distinctive calls of the bitterns. You stand a fair chance of hearing them at rushy wetlands as late as January (South Coast).

9. **Encouragement**

Finally, I encourage all participants to **do their best** in this **final season of counts** for the Waterbird Project. If you have any queries or know of persons who **still might** like to join our team, please let me know. We look like producing a very good overall result — let's make it an **outstanding** result!

**Survey Dates:** January 5th-13th

March 9th-17th

May 11th-19th

## OBSERVATIONS

As an experiment, *Interesting Waterbird Sightings* and *General Observations* have been combined under the one heading in this issue. Shire names are given in brackets.

The following records have been partly vetted, that is, further confirmation might well be sought before some of these observations are published in the 1984 Bird Report. Individual observers will be acknowledged in the Bird Report.

All records are for 1984 unless otherwise indicated.

**Bold type** indicates wetlands under study in the South-West Waterbird Project.

1. **South-West and Eucla Land Divisions**

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Frigatebird sp        | — 1, early August, Merredin   |
| Red-tailed Tropicbird | — 1, 6/5, Kalbarri: harassed by ravens.   |
| Pacific Heron         | — 1 sitting on nest in <i>Casuarina</i> grove, Noonying L. (Tammin), 14/9.  |
|                       | — 4,, 17/10, <b>Eneminga Pool</b> (Dandara-gan): two nests with eggs.   |
|                       | — 5 nests with young, 3/11, yate swamp near Tyrell's Road, (Esperance).   |
|                       | All three records constitute new  |
|                       | — breeding localities. The Esperance record may be the first for that Shire.  |
| White-faced Heron     | — a 'creche' of immature birds (the majority of a flock of 65), in a shallow lagoon near the <b>Harvey River delta</b> (Murray), 22/10. |



- Little Egret — 14, 28/3 Coodanup (North side of Peel Inlet): high count.
- Rufous Night Heron — more than 50 active nests in a yate swamp near Tyrell's Road, ENE of Esperance: possibly the first breeding reported in this shire.
- Little Bittern — New records for the Waterbird Project include:  
1, 19/9, **Moates Lake** (Albany)  
1, 8/10, **Nine Mile Lake** (Murray)  
1, 7/11, **Grasmere Lake** (Albany)  
1, 21/11, **Joondalup Lake** (Wanneroo)  
— a nest with egg-shells from the (?) 1983/84 breeding season was found in spike-rush, 15km WSW of Condinup on 2/11. A bird was seen in this district later in November.  
These constitute the first records of this species from Esperance Shire.  
— from the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, sightings (up to 5) almost daily from 10-25/11, often near mid-day. Flying adult males and females.
- Australasian Bittern — 1, 11/8, 13km N of Mt Arid (Esperance)  
— 1, 28/8, **Lake Sadie** (Albany)  
— 3, 6/11, **Boat Harbour Swamp** (Denmark)
- Glossy Ibis — 5, 29/8, Yunderup Canals (Murray)  
— 2, 3/10, **White Water Lake** (Corrigin)  
— 3, November, E of Esperance  
Rarely seen away from the West coast.
- Straw-necked Ibis — 15 to 20 nests with eggs or young, 16/11, **Crackers Swamp** (Dandara-gan); a new breeding colony.
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill — approximately 40 birds, many nesting, November, near Mandurah in paper-bark swamp: one of the largest SW colonies for this species.  
— 24, 2/9, **Crackers Swamp** (Dandara-gan): young birds included.
- Wandering Whistling Duck — ? August, Mongers Lake (Metro).
- Black Swan — 66 including many with nests, 23/8, **Salt River** (Quairading)
- Freckled Duck — 2, 8/10, **McLarty Lake** (Murray)  
— 7, 11/10, **Eneminga Lake** (Dandara-gan)  
Both are new localities for Waterbird Project.  
— nest with eggs, 12/10, **Crackers Sw** (Dandara-gan).
- Chestnut Teal — 6, 13/9, Harvey Sewage Tanks: second record here.  
— 4 clutches just hatched, 19/9, **Lake Gore** (Esperance). First breeding record for Waterbird Project.
- Osprey — 1, late August, Herdsman Lake (metro): occasionally seen inland.
- Square-tailed Kite — 1, 5/9, Helena Valley (Kalamunda): first for 1984/85 season?  
— nesting near Mt Ragged-Balladonia Track, October.
- White-bellied Sea Eagle — sitting on nest in tuart near Peel Inlet, 27/10.
- Spotted Harrier — 1, 16/6, Rottnest  
— 1, 12/8, building a nest, N of Meredin
- Peregrine Falcon — 1, 25/7, Booragoon (metro)
- Grey Falcon — report of 2, 7/8, near Yuna (Chapman Valley).
- Brown Quail — 1, 4/6, SE of Robert Bay, Peel Inlet: in wet heath.
- Little Button-quail — 4, 5/11, calling in barley crop, near Lake Muir.  
— early October, Mt Ragged-Balladonia track.
- Buff-banded Rail, Baillon's Crake & Spotless Crake - nests with eggs, at **Crackers Swamp** (Dandara-gan) on 16/11, 27/9 and 16/11 respectively.
- Black-tailed Native-hen — 91, 6/9, **Murchison River** at Galena.  
— early October, Mt Ragged-Balladonia track.
- Lesser Golden Plover — 1, 15/11, mouth of Preston River near Bunbury.
- Hooded Plover — 4, 19/7, 2km E of Newdegate (Lake Grace).  
— 1, 19/7, 10km W of Lake King settlement (Lake Grace).  
— 2, 9/10, 5km SW of **Lake Magenta** (Kent).  
— 3, 25/10, **Balicup Lake** (Cranbrook).  
— 12, 26/10, 5km N of **Camel Lake** (Tambellup).  
All new localities for the Waterbird Project.
- Black-winged Stilt — 53, some on nests, 28/10, **Bokan Lake** (Narrogin).
- Little Curlew — 1, 11/11, Mandurah: scarce in the South-West.
- Wood Sandpiper — 6, 21/9, **Alfred Cove**: a new locality.
- Marsh Sandpiper — 1, 26/9, **Alcoa Claypit Lake**, Balddivis (Rockingham).  
— 2, 22/10, lagoon near delta of **Harvey River** (Murray).
- Terek Sandpiper — 1, 18/10, Woodman Point (metro).
- Black-tailed Godwit — 4, 22/10, Wittecarra Creek (Northampton).  
— 1, 1/11, **Gore Lake** (Esperance): new for this shire?  
— 1, 4/11, Como (metro).
- Bar-tailed Godwit — 55, 17/11, Mandurah: high count.
- Pectoral Sandpiper — 1, 22/10, Wittecarra Creek (Northampton).
- Long-toed Stint — 1, 9/10, **Alfred Cove** (metro): early arrival.  
— 1, 1/11, S of **Lake Gore** (Esperance): new locality for Waterbird Project.
- Sanderling — 63, 12/11, WAPET Groyne, Woodman Point.
- Great Skua — 1, 19/8, South of Fremantle.  
Also quite a few records of Jaegers in November.
- White-winged Tern — 6, 16/11, **Crackers Swamp** (Dandara-gan): strong westerly blowing.
- Gull-billed Tern — 3, 4/11, **Alfred Cove** (metro): rare in metro area.
- Common Tern — 6, 11/11, Mandurah Seawall.
- Arctic Tern — 1, 4/11, **Alfred Cove** (metro): in flight.  
— 1, 12/11, **Joondalup Lake** (Wanneroo): record supported by description. Note: strong westerly winds preceded these observations.
- Fairy Tern — 150 birds plus many nests, November, Mandurah.
- Laughing Turtle-dove — 54, 12/6, Cottesloe: see comment in previous newsletter.
- Purple-crowned Lorikeet — breeding at Newman Rock, Eyre Highway, in early October.
- Regent Parrot — 24, 4/6, olive grove S of Walyunga Lake (Rockingham).  
— up to 3, late July, Harvey: second observation here and first since December 1977.



- Budgerigar — 4, 31/10, 30km W of Corrigin. Have observers seen these birds further south than this in 1984?
- Elegant Parrot — 26/9, Gwelup (metro).
- Barking Owl — 1 in garden, 19/7, Walliston (Kalamunda)
- Spotted Nightjar — 1, 2/11, C Arid National Park (Esperance): calling at 0430 hours.
- Southern Scrub-robin — nest with one egg, 17/8, Hopetoun.
- Scarlet Robin — several, up to 60km E of Esperance, winter.
- Crested Shrike-tit — Julimar Forest, 1/10 (Toodyay).
- Gilbert's Whistler — breeding in early October on the Mt Ragged to Balladonia track and in the Frank Hann National Park.
- Western Whipbird — 1 calling, 10/9, Lake Grace North: a known locality.
- White-winged Fairy-wren — nest with young, December 1983, near City Beach Surf Live-saving Club.
- Pied Honeyeater — 100km E of Lake King in Frank Hann National Park, early October: unusual locality?
- several, 15/9, roadside shrubs E of Wubin in farmland.
- Red-eared Firetail — 1, 10/9, The Two Hills, near Lake Muir (Manjimup): a northerly locality in this district.
- Masked Woodswallow — 11, 7/10, Cheyne's Beach: second record here in 8 years. Strong 80km/h winds: birds roosting in coastal scrub. See also Eyre Report in this issue.

## 2. Central and Northern

- Streaked Shearwater — 3, 16/9, Roebuck Bay at Broome: refer to Atlas text.
- Wilson's Storm-Petrel — maximum of 75, May 1984, drilling rig 45km W of Barrow Island.
- Great-billed Heron — 1, early June, Derby.
- Black Bittern — 1, attacked by Little Eagle at a lagoon near Wyndham: July(?)
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill — 1, August, Telfer Sewage Dam.
- Plumed Whistling-duck — 1, Nallan Claypan (Great Northern Highway S of Meekatharra), 16/9.
- Freckled Duck — 35, 20/9, Breberle Lake (freshwater lake with flooded eucalypts) — 150 km E of Overlander Roadhouse, Curbur Station.
- Osprey — 11/9, nest in tower at Port Samson.
- Black-breasted Kite — Port Warrender, 1 on 24/8.
- Grey Goshawk — a female on the wharf at Derby, 28/8.
- Brown Quail — 1, 19/9, Carnarvon: calling (later flushed) in rank grass and low trees beside swamp.
- Chestnut-backed Button Quail — 2, March, Osmond Valley (160km SSW of Kununurra).
- Buff-banded Rail & Australian Crakes — McNeill Claypan, near Carnarvon, 19/9: recent nests also found, in small lignum bushes and tall thickets of acacia seedlings.
- Baillon's Crake — 1, 5/10, McNeill Claypan, Carnarvon.
- Chestnut Rail — good views on Prince Regent River, June-August, Nats Club.
- Large Sand Plover — at Bimbij Station (Goldfields), 2-7/9: unusual away from coast.
- Oriental Plover — first seen by an observer travelling in the Kimberley in 'winter-spring' were on Roebuck Bay on 16/9.
- Little Curlew — 24, 19/9, Carnarvon (McNeill Claypan): early arrivals?
- Common Redshank — 1, 31/8, Roebuck Bay, description supplied.
- Asian Dowitcher — 127, 21/9, Leslie Saltworks, Port Hedland: previous largest concentration in Australia was comparable

(130) in early April 1982 at Leslie Saltworks.

- 1, 2/9, Roebuck Bay: new Australian locality, description supplied.
- Whiskered & Gull-billed Terns — breeding at Lake Aneen near Meekatharra, 16/9.
- Lesser Crested Tern — 2, mid-August, Monkey Mia.
- Common Tern — 46, 18/9, Broome Jetty.
- Roseate & White-winged Terns — mixed flock of several thousands, The Blowholes on Quobba Station, N of Carnarvon, 29/2-7/4, Roseates still gathering in October.
- Red-crowned Pigeon — Prince Regent River, June-August.
- Partridge Pigeon — 4, 24/8, Mitchell Falls.
- Spinifex Pigeon — early September, Byro Station (N Goldfields).
- Little Corella — 15-20, 15/4, at drilling rig, 45km W of Barrow Island: one bird exhausted.
- Cinnamon Quail-thrush — 5, 18/8, N of Thundelarra HS (SE of Yalgoo): singing while perched conspicuously in low shrubs. After soaking rain.
- Zitting Cisticola — 1, 19/8, Marlgu Billabong, Lower Ord River floodplain: description supplied. All WA records come from this area.
- Green-backed Gerygone — 1, 27/8, Bell Creek Gorge & Falls: southern limit of range?
- White-browed Scrub-wren — 2, 9/10, Carnarvon Sewage Ponds: northern limit?
- Grey Honeyeater — 3, 25/9, Mt Tom Price Caravan Park.
- Gouldian Finch — 20 to 30, 17/8, near Lake Argyle turnoff.
- Little Woodswallow — 15, 18/8, N of Thundelarra HS (N Goldfields)

## A REVIEW OF THE LATEST BIRD GUIDE

### *The Birds of Australia: A Book of Identification*

Text edited by Ken Simpson; illustrations by Nicolas Day  
Published by Currey O'Neil, Melbourne. Rrp \$35.95.

Acquisition of this new guide is a 'must' for anyone striving to become the complete bird-watcher! Equipped with the text of Pizzey's guide, the maps of the Atlas and now the illustrations of Simpson's guide, observers should be able to confidently identify all birds which regularly occur in Australia.

The **presentation and convenient layout** of the book will immediately impress the reader. Information is up-to-date and a number of innovations have been incorporated, particularly in the illustrations. This book caters both for beginners — who will appreciate the Key to Families — and experienced ornithologists — who will value the illustrations of many sub-species and immatures in particular.

This is the first guide to all the birds of Australia which presents **texts** opposite the appropriate illustrations. Unfortunately, the texts have been limited to a 'skeleton' style in order to achieve this type of layout. The large size of Simpson's guide detracts from its suitability as a field tool.

Pages in the second part of the book (**'The Handbook'**) commence with a highly readable outline of the life cycles of birds, fossil birds, habitats and avifaunal regions. Within each family, accounts of relationships, ecology, behaviour and breeding biology are given. The bar charts of breeding seasons are impressive but interpretation is hampered where widespread species breed in different seasons in northern Australia. I also wonder if sufficient data exists to support this level of detail for many species.

Some recent **taxonomic developments** have been incorporated, e.g. the splitting of the White-Tailed Black-Cockatoo into two species, the 'lumping' of the WA subspecies of Long-billed

Corella with the Little Corella and the new wader, Cox's Sandpiper *Calidris paramelanotos*. Other advances have been ignored, e.g. the new warbler *Gerygone ruficauda* described in the *Western Australian Naturalist* in 1983.

Although an impressive list of authors and advisers is given, the absence of any major contribution from ornithologists in Western Australia is immediately apparent in the distribution maps. Numerous errors have been presented: some of the more important corrections to be noted are as follows:

- Corrections (maps)**
1. Yellow White-eye is **not** known from the South-West;
  2. maps for Black and Lesser Noddies are transposed;
  3. Masked Lapwings are scarce in the South-West;
  4. distributions of Hooded Plover and Purple-gaped Honeyeater are more extensive;
  5. Pin-tailed Snipe and Broad-billed Sandpipers have their strongholds in the Pilbara (not included).

Use of dots would have been preferable to hatchings for vagrants and unusual occurrences. The concept of breeding distributions is misleading, particularly for species which nest in colonies (e.g. Glossy Ibis — c.f. Atlas).

Inclusion of certain unconfirmed vagrants in the book is a questionable approach, but doubtless improves the selling potential of the guide. Many vagrants of years gone by are now known to be regulars (e.g. Yellow Wagtail), but perhaps vagrants could have been illustrated in a separate section to avoid confusion.

Shapes, proportions and attitudes portrayed in the illustrations are generally good or excellent and background colours are appropriate. Colours are accurately illustrated and printed, many flight illustrations and typical postures have been incorporated and the line drawings are often imaginative.

- Corrections (illustrations)**
1. the non-breeding Australasian Grebe should have the buffy flanks;
  2. head profiles of species 31 and 32 are transposed;
  3. egrets suffer from inaccurate soft part colours, bill proportions and bill shapes;
  4. the flight illustration of Black Bittern is mislabelled; and the line drawing of the male Little Bittern is incorrect (more like Yellow Bittern);
  5. labels are transposed for races of the Blue Bonnet.

The illustrations of waders are the best yet produced and the flight depictions of button-quails are an important innovation.

In conclusion, this book makes a significant contribution to ornithology in Australia and by virtue of its illustrations, is certain to be widely used by casual and serious observers alike.

Roger Jaensch

The ten sites most visited by teams in the 1983 tally were (in descending order):

- |                  |                     |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Pelican Point | 6. Forrestdale Lake |
| 2. Alfred Cove   | 7. King's Park      |
| 3. Herdsman Lake | 8. Mongers Lake     |
| 4. Thomsons Lake | 9. Yangebup Lake    |
| 5. Bibra Lake    | 10. Booragoon Lake  |

#### Perth's 'Top 21' Birds — December 1983

##### Seen by 21 teams:

Welcome Swallow  
Red Wattlebird  
Singing Honeyeater  
Australian Raven

##### Seen by 20 teams:

Australasian Grebe  
Black Swan  
Pacific Black Duck  
Rainbow Bee-eater  
Brown Honeyeater  
Australian Magpie

##### Seen by 19 teams:

Little Pied Cormorant  
White-faced Heron  
Hardhead  
Eurasian Goot  
Red-capped Plover  
Silver Gull  
Laughing Turtle-Dove  
Tree Martin  
Rufous Whistler  
Willie Wagtail  
Australian Magpie

A Report on the 1984 Tally should appear in the next issue of this newsletter.

Ron Van Delft

#### 'MULGA BIRDS' IN AGRICULTURAL AREAS: Spring 1984

The following sightings of birds usually considered typical of mulga habitats (outside agricultural areas) were made in the spring of 1984 in the north-eastern wheatbelt. The exceptionally good conditions in the Gascoyne, Murchison and Eastern Goldfields regions (first half of 1984) may have had some influence on these occurrences.

**Diamond Dove** — East Kalannie (15/9)

**Budgerigar** — East Kalannie (15/9); Bonnie Rock (15/9); Geelakin Rock (16-19/9); Trayning area (20/9); Meenar (12/9)

**Mulga Parrot** — Petrudor Rock/W Kalannie (11/8); breeding (resident?)

**Black-eared Cuckoo** — Petrudor Rock/W Kalannie (11/8); Geeranning Rock (15/9); Geelakin Rock (16-19/9)

**Red-backed Kingfisher** — Geelakin Rock (16-19/9); Kondut and Dowerin (21/9); Meenar (22/9)

**Redthroat** — Petrudor Rock/W Kalannie (11/8) breeding; resident (?); Geelakin Rock (16-19/9)

**White-fronted, Black and Pied Honeyeaters** — Geeranning Rock (15/9); Geelakin Rock (16-19/9)

**Crimson Chat** — Trayning area (20/9); Kondut and Dowerin (21/9); Meenar (22/9). For the past four years, Crimson Chats have been present and bred in the Bolgart to Kondut region.

**Mulga Parrots and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters** are nearly always to be seen at Walyormouring Lake (near Goomalling) and both species breed there.

Jim R. Masters

## MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

### PERTH'S 'TOP 21' BIRDS

A full analysis of data from the 1983 Metropolitan 24 hour Bird Tally has provided an indication of birds most commonly seen in the Perth Metropolitan Area in early December. The table below lists species seen by 19 or more of the 21 groups of observers which participated in the tally.

Several factors need to be kept in mind when examining the list. Some bias might have occurred because of the habitats at sites visited. Information on habitats visited revealed that nine teams did not visit ocean/beach sites and 16 teams looked at lake habitats.

Other factors influencing the list might include wind, time spent by observers in each habitat, disruptions at certain sites (e.g. dogs; other teams!), and experience within a team — particularly concerning elusive species.

## NOTICES

### 1. Assistant Warden for Eyre

Applications are invited for the position of Assistant Warden at the Eyre Bird Observatory which is 30km south of Cocklebidy on the Eyre Highway, 1100km east of Perth.

Duties include assisting the Warden in running the Observatory, e.g. organising accommodation, meals and activities for visitors. The position could appeal to a retired married couple, but applications from both couples and individuals will be considered. Whilst a long term appointment is desirable, a short-term of between two and six months is possible. Free accommodation is provided and a small salary will be negotiated.

Further information is available from Barbara Hale, Chairman, RAOU (WA Group), 30/15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge, WA 6153, with whom applications close on 21 December 1984.

## 2. Goods and Equipment for Eyre

Many thanks to all those who donated household goods and tools for the Eyre Bird Observatory. These have now been delivered and will make accommodation there more comfortable for both the Warden and visitors.

We still need a deep freezer, 6 upright armless dining chairs, 6 mattresses, 2 double-tier bunk beds, single beds, and a torque wrench.

If anyone can help with these items, please let **Roz Denny** know. Monetary donations may be sent to the Office, 30/15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge 6153.

## 3. Spotted and Yellow-rumped Pardalotes

Julian Ford is carrying out research on the taxonomic and ecological relationships of the Spotted and Yellow-rumped Pardalotes and is seeking assistance from fellow members.

The following information is being sought for each species:

- (a) **Localities** where seen, together (where possible) with **habitats** and dates of observation.
- (b) **Breeding** details, i.e. localities and dates where active burrows have been found.

He would be grateful for such data stored in your note-books or obtained in the future. This can be forwarded to:

Dr Julian Ford  
School of Applied Chemistry  
WAIT BENTLEY WA 6102

## 4. Pascal — Computing

Ron Van Delft is hoping that a member or friend with a working knowledge of the Pascal language will be available to advise him in the preparation of programmes. Data for the Metropolitan Bird Project will be stored and analysed through use of Pascal programmes. Enquiries to RAOU office, WA.

## 5. Pesticide Action Group

The Pesticide Action Group is a "non-partisan organisation dedicated to alerting the public and politicians to the hazards associated with pesticides in WA". The group has already achieved some success in persuading the government of the need for greater control over the use of pesticides by local councils (remember wader deaths, February 1984).

Subscriptions to PAG are \$5.00 (\$2.00 if unemployed) and these or donations and enquiries should be directed to:

PAG  
c/- Environment Centre  
794 Hay Street  
PERTH WA 6000  
Telephone: 321 4507

## 6. Books! Books! Books!

The following books are available to members at the WA Office at the special prices indicated. Each would make a fine Christmas gift.

- *The Birds of Australia: A Book of Identification* by Simpson & Day  
A brand new comprehensive field guide (see review in this issue). Retailing at \$35.95; RAOU price \$29.95 plus \$1.50 postage and packaging.
- *Bird Life* by Ian Rowley  
Paperback edition of this classic work. Rrp is \$9.95; our price \$8 plus packing and postage.
- *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia* by G. Pizzey  
This book has an excellent text and is available at \$14 plus packing and postage (rrp \$16.95).
- Don't forget the amazing *RAOU Calendar for 1985* priced at \$8.  
B. Barratt & S. Keeling.

## 6. Rottnest

There are opportunities to join in with RAOU activities on Rottnest Island over the Christmas-New Year school holiday period.

These activities include films, lectures and bird-walks through which the RAOU will be playing a part in the education programme of the Island's Board.

Members who are prepared to lead **daily bird-walks** will be offered **free accommodation** on the island — a considerable incentive as accommodation at this time of year is rare and very expensive!

If you would like to participate in any way, please contact Steve Keeling on (09) 291 7592.

## 8. Christmas Island Calendars

For four years the Christmas Island Natural History Association has produced a beautiful wall-hanging calendar. It depicts in 13 glossy photographs the unique and fascinating features of this tropical Australian Territory in the Indian Ocean.

This year the 1985 Calendar is being made available to all Australians. For a calendar with a difference at good value, contact the RAOU office in WA for a copy of the order form (we have the old 1984 calendar for display).

## 9. Asian Colour-dyed Waders

Between late August and November 1984, an international study of wader migration throughout Eastern Asia is being conducted. Migratory waders of all species will be caught, banded and colour-dyed on the underparts. **In Borneo they will be dyed yellow; in Thailand, blue; and in Japan, green.** All bird watchers are requested to look out for these birds in their travels over the next six months. After a month or so the dye tends to fade, but less rapidly on the underwings, where it can be seen on birds in flight. Details of numbers of birds, date, location and species should be sent to the following addresses.

RAOU Wader Studies Programme  
21 Gladstone Street  
MOONEE PONDS VIC 3039  
or  
Australian Bird Banding Scheme  
PO Box 84  
LYNEHAM ACT 2602

Brett Lane RAOU Wader Studies Co-ordinator

## 10. Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre

The Centre is now open seven days a week **between 9.00am and 4.30pm** and at other times by arrangement. In order to keep the Centre open during weekends and school holidays, when the Gould League staff are not available, we rely on **volunteers** to man the Centre. We badly need people who have a reasonable knowledge of waterbirds to be guides. If your waterbird identification is not too good we still need help with manning the door and would be most grateful for your assistance. We are also desperately short of **binoculars and telescopes** so if you have an old pair that you don't use any more then they could certainly be put to good use at the Wildlife Centre.

If you can help with either equipment or time, please contact me on 384 3185.

Thank you. Mandy Silderstein.

## 11. The Edgecombe Bird Sanctuary

A private bird sanctuary, located 22km from Perth in the suburb of Belhus (near Upper Swan) has been 'discovered' by RAOU. A small colony of Little Black Cormorants breed on the wetland and 26 species were observed in a one hour survey. The vegetation around the swamp is very disturbed and weedy, but some good stands of flooded gums (*Euc. rudis*) and paperbarks are present. Members wishing to view the area should contact Don Edgecombe on 296 4325. Anyone wishing to do **monthly surveys** for the Metro Bird Project at the sanctuary should contact the office.

## 12. Registration of Significant Areas of the Natural Environment by the Australian Heritage Commission

The major function of the Australian Heritage Commission is the identification and protection of the National Estate. The National Estate is defined in the Commission's Act as:

"those places, being components of the natural environment of Australia that have aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance, or other special value for future generations, as well as for the present community."

## The Register

Places which form the National Estate are registered. The Register is kept as a public record and research tool. Any member of the Public can nominate a place(s) for registration. The public also has access to information on the register.

### Nominations for Registration

There is undoubtedly a great wealth of knowledge amongst members of the RAOU about places in Western Australia that deserve inclusion on the National Estate Register.

Members of the RAOU are encouraged/invited to submit nominations of natural environment areas.

Consistent with the Commission's goal to complete the Register of the National Estate, the Commission has appointed a Research Officer/Secretary for its evaluation panel in each State. The Western Australian Research Officer is John McComb.

Enquiries about nominations can be made by contacting him on: 332 2355 (work); 384 7364 (home) 321 4507 (Environment Centre).

### 13. Tour of the National Parks of Malaysia

A tour of the fabulous Taman Negara and mount Kinabalu rain forest parks and other areas of interest to bird watchers will be run from 6th-27th April 1985. The cost should be approximately \$1,700 and enquiries concerning the few seats left should be **urgently** directed to New Horizons, 1st Floor, 95 St Georges Terrace, Perth (phone 321 7823).

### 14. Subscriptions to "Western Australian Bird Notes"

#### ALL READERS PLEASE NOTE

Owing to the **high cost** of production of this publication and the coming **termination of funds** provided by the Waterbird Project, those wishing to receive *WA Bird Notes* from the March 1985 issue (inclusive) should **send subscriptions** for four issues in 1985 to the RAOU office in WA **before 1st January 1985**.

Rates for 1985 — RAOU members	\$6
— institutions and organisations (unless involved in exchanges)	\$10

We regret that this change has become necessary and that we now cannot offer *Bird Notes* to non-members.

Please use the enclosed leaflet.

Thank you.

## COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Check March 1985 Newsletter for any changes.

December 9	— Metro bird-walk, Wanneroo Shire
December 16	— Excursion, Lower Swan
January 13	— Metro bird-walk, Forrestdale Lake
January 14	— <b>Meeting:</b> AGM
January 20	— Metro bird-walk, Gwelup Lake
January 25-28	— CAMPOUT: Torbay
January 26	— Excursion, Gingin area
February 9	— Metro bird-walk, Kings Park and Pelican Point
February 9-17	— National Wader Count
February 25	— <b>Meeting:</b> Nick Dymond
March 2-3	— CAMPOUT: Goodale Sanctuary and McLarty/Mealup Lakes
March 10	— Excursion, Bibra and Yangebup Lakes
March 24	— Metro bird-walk, Subiaco and Shenton Park
March 25	— <b>Meeting:</b> Another speaker?
March 30	— Special Waterbird Survey, Dumbleyung Lake
April 13	— Metro bird-walk, Whiteman Park
April 20	— Seabird trip to shelf, off Rottnest
April 28	— Excursion, Cooloongup Lake
May 5	— Excursion, John Forrest National Park
May 6	— <b>Meeting:</b> discussion/study
May 13	— Special Waterbird Survey, Peel Inlet
May 25	— Excursion, Chittering Valley

## EYRE COURSES

**17-23 March:** Bird Banding

**19-25 May:** Birding for Beginners

**11-17 August:** Eyre Bird Observatory

**1-7 September:** Bird Banding

**13-19 October:** Nests and Territories

**3-9 November:** Photography

**Early December:** Field Ornithology

## PUBLICATIONS

Publications and items for sale or ordering at the RAOU Office, general meetings, some excursions and other events.

☆ <i>The Atlas of Australian Birds</i>	\$49.00
☆ Overlays for the Atlas	\$ 6.00
☆ <i>Methods of Censusing Birds in Australia</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>Bird Report for W.A. — 1982</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ Report of the Middlesex Study Centre	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>A Pocket List of Australian Birds</i>	\$ 0.50
☆ <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia</i> , by G. Pizzey (paperback)	\$14.00
☆ <i>The Birds of Australia</i> by K. Simpson	\$29.95
☆ RAOU ties (navy-blue or maroon with silver emus)	\$10.00
☆ RAOU emu badges	\$ 3.00
☆ <i>Western Australian Bird Notes</i>	\$6.00

Brochures, forms and publications available free of charge at the RAOU Office:

- *Birding in W.A.*: New member brochure.
- programme of courses at Eyre; Eyre Brochure.
- Nest Record Scheme data forms.
- Raptor Survey Scheme data forms.
- *Articles of Association* of the RAOU.

Note that prices do not include postage — this will be charged to you if required.

## ADVICE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The editors of *W.A. Bird Notes* would like to ask those contributing written material to the newsletter, to note the following points:

- ★ copy should be **typed** with double spacing;
- ★ text should be broken into **paragraphs**, preferably containing not more than four or five sentences;
- ★ careful attention ought to be given to use of **upper and lower case letters**: eg. 'a flock of unidentified cormorants', or 'a flock of Great Cormorants';
- ★ a suggested method for recording **dates and localities** is eg. '11 May 1984, seven km SW of Moora' (ie. spell out one to nine, then use figures);
- ★ use the **English Names** for birds recommended by the RAOU for use in all publications about birds in Australia: these are given in the *Pocket List* available at the WA Office.

### DEADLINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

for March issue — third Friday in January  
for June issue — third Friday in April  
for September issue — third Friday in July  
for December issue — third Friday in October