



Western Australian Bird Notes

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Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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ANCHORS IN THE SKY

On 22 April, 1985, on one of the last warm afternoons of late summer, I was fortunate to observe three parties of Fork-tailed Swifts moving north over the Canning River Valley in Roleystone.

The first group of about 12-15 birds with some Tree Martins passed quickly north. The second appeared about ten minutes later. Soon there were about 50 birds overhead in a column that extended out of sight. The lowest were just above the marri tree-tops, their dark colour and contrasting white rumps clearly visible. The higher birds, like anchors in the sky, were swirling and feeding. They remained some minutes before going north. The third group of about eight birds followed quickly and by 14.00 hrs, there was not a swift to be seen.

It is reported in the R.A.O.U. Atlas that Fork-tailed Swifts are attracted to bushfires to feed on disturbed insects. It is relevant then that there was a small bushfire about two kms to the east, and in the light N.E. breeze the smoke was drifting away to the south-west. The birds must have passed downwind of the fire if their direction from the south-east was consistent just before they reached my location.

Elizabeth King

WESTERN WHIPBIRD AND WESTERN BRISTLEBIRD SURVEY

The RAOU has been granted funds by the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service for a survey of the Western Whipbird and Western Bristlebird in Western Australia. The aim of this study is to establish the current status of these two species. Shapelle McNee has been appointed Field Officer for this project which will run for three months. Field work will be carried out during June and July.

During the last 150 years the coastal areas of the south-west of Western Australia have undergone considerable change. These changes continue to occur with pressures of land clearing and fire. Bird species such as the Western Bristlebird, Western Whipbird, Noisy Scrub-bird and Ground Parrot have been particularly susceptible to these pressures.

The Western Bristlebird was formerly widespread along the coast in heath from the Fitzgerald River National Park to Perth. (G.T. Smith, 1977, *Emu* 77:173-179). The Field Atlas shows the Bristlebird to be restricted in distribution to Two Peoples Bay and Fitzgerald River National Park.

The Western Whipbird was formerly found from Wongan Hills, south-east to Hopetoun, west to Denmark and south to

Photographs by Bert and Babs Wells



Mother Mistletoe bird brings food to the cradle. Look out for Mistletoe birds at high perches in the metropolitan area: their piercing calls are often heard during winter.

Margaret River (G.T. Smith, 1977, *Emu* 77:173-179). The Field Atlas shows the Western Whipbird restricted to Two Peoples Bay, Fitzgerald River National Park and north of Ongerup.

Like the Noisy Scrub-bird, the Western Bristlebird and Western Whipbird are birds of great character and intrigue. Harley Webster gives a vivid portrayal of these three species.

All three have similar strong legs, feet and beaks; all have short wings and comparatively weak powers of flight but astonishing speed of foot. ... all three are dull coloured, spend all their lives in thick vegetation, either low scrub, thickets or in the heavy cover of deep gullies, ... The Scrub-bird is the master strategist and I have never caught one unawares but the Bristlebird, while running him very close, is also full of curiosity and one of the most confirmed "stickybeaks" in the bush. Whipbirds, by contrast, seem to pay little attention to an observer unless he is clumsy when they glide silently away and usually do not call again for a considerable time. (Western Australian Naturalist 10:25-28, 1966.)

Sites at which Western Bristlebirds and Western Whipbirds have been recorded historically and in the Field Atlas, will be surveyed. New locations will also be surveyed, possibly extending our knowledge of the distribution and preferred habitat of these birds.

Shapelle would be interested in any sightings of the Western Whipbird or Western Bristlebird whether recently, a few years ago or many years ago. Details of such sightings can be sent to the WA Office of the RAOU, or Shapelle McNee can be contacted directly by telephoning (09) 330 1038.

EDITORIAL

This issue of W.A. Bird Notes is shorter than recent issues due to a shortage of material submitted and other work commitments for the editor. If a great volume of material is received for the September issue, it might be extended to cover 14 rather than 12 pages. Of course, there is no point in publishing articles to fill extra pages unless they are worthy of being read!

We welcome the assistance of **Allan and Rose Jones** in producing this issue, making the task of the editor somewhat simpler. It is quite likely that a new editor will be needed after the December 1985 issue.

COMING MEETINGS

Meetings of the WA Group of the RAOU are currently held in the **Herdsmen Lake Wildlife Centre**, unless a different venue is announced in this newsletter. The room opens at 7.30pm and meetings aim to start at 8.00pm. Visitors are especially welcome.

Car-parking space is available at the entrance to the Centre's driveway, near the intersection of Flynn Road and Selby Street, Wembley.

Monday 24 June: Dr Denis Saunders, CSIRO — Avifauna

Changes on Rottnest over time

Dr Saunders has been involved with research into Australian birds for a number of years, principally with CSIRO Wildlife and Rangelands Research Division at Helena Valley. His special concerns have included Black-Cockatoos and Corellas in Western Australia. He has also spent a great deal of time on Rottnest and together with G. Smith and P. de Rebeira has published a checklist of its birds.

Monday 5 August: Ron Johnstone — Identification of seabirds

Through his work in the Ornithology Section at the W.A. Museum, Ron Johnstone has often dealt with beach-washed seabirds which members of the public have brought in to be identified. Ron has several research interests with seabirds and has been involved in the Australasian Seabird Group of the RAOU for many years. At this meeting he will use study skins to discuss the identification of seabirds on the wing and on the shore. This will be most relevant to those beachcombers looking for specimens on our coastline in August and September.

Monday 30 September: Speaker to be confirmed in next newsletter.

COMING EXCURSIONS

Excursions and campouts are directed toward both country and metropolitan localities and aim to provide experience in bird recognition and appreciation to 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 = Joining excursion of MBP and RAOU.
RAOU = 'standard' RAOU excursions.

Saturday, June 8: Swanbourne Beach/Lake Claremont (RAOU/MBP)

We will be specifically looking for White-winged Fairy-wrens in the sand dunes at Swanbourne, starting at the Swanbourne Beach

carpark (north end of Marine Parade) at 0800. Gather at the south end of Strickland Street, Swanbourne at 1030 for a look at Lake Claremont.

Saturday, June 22: Tutanning Nature Reserve/Pingelly District (RAOU Day Trip)

Meet at 0800 on the roadside just past the intersection of Canning Road and Brookton Hwy, Karragullen (on the Brookton side, before Gardiner Road). Return trip of approx. 400km. Some might like to organize sharing of vehicles after arriving at the meeting place.

After a rendezvous at the Pingelly Post Office at 0945 we will visit the powderbark woodland and heath in nearby Tutanning Nature Reserve, hoping to see Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens, Crested Bellbirds, Redthroats and possibly Black-eared Cuckoos. If time permits, nearby lakes could also be inspected.

Organizer: Roger Jaensch.

Saturday, June 29: Excursion Leadership Workshop

If you have ever wanted to lead a birdwalk but thought "I don't know enough about birds" or "I don't know any good places" then come along to this workshop. Topics to be covered include excursion pre-planning, publicity, handling flocks of birdwatchers and newchums, introductory speeches, commonly asked questions and how to fob off tricky questions to knowledgeable looking RAOU members. The workshop will be held at Herdsmen Wildlife Centre at 1 p.m. sharp. A one dollar charge will be levied to cover room hire and materials.

Sunday, June 30: Lake Monger (MBP)

Meet at 2 p.m. at the carpark beside the bowling green on the west side of the lake. Will the Lake Monger Freckled Ducks be seen?

Sunday, July 21: Pinnaroo Valley (MBP)

Meet at 2 p.m. at the carparking area in the park, near the small lake. You can't stay indoors all winter!

Sunday, August 4: Manung Lake (MBP)

Meet at 2 p.m. near the corner of Davilak Ave and Azelia Rd, Spearwood.

Saturday, August 17: Wambyn and St Ronan's Well Nature Reserves (RAOU Day Trip)

We plan to visit several nature reserves in the western parts of the Shires of York and Northam. The wandoo, jam and York Gum woodland ought to support a wide variety of birds preparing for breeding.

Meet at 0800 at the carpark at Centrepont Shopping Centre, Great Eastern Highway, Midland. Some cars could be left at the carpark.

Organizer: Bruce Buchanan.

School Holidays: Rottnest Campout (?)

Plans for an RAOU campout on Rottnest in the August School holidays are still being finalised. For details of this event contact Steve Keeling on 291 7592 or the RAOU office (WA) closer to this time.

**Saturday 31 August to Thursday 5 September: Campout -
Petrudor Rock, Mt Churchman, Bimbijy Station**

Petrudor Rock is about 270 km from Perth and is off the Pithara-Kalannie Road (page 17, Travellers' Atlas). We will meet and camp here on Saturday, so some might like to make a weekend trip to see Scrub-robins, Shy Hylacolas and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters. Self-sufficient bush camping, some water available. At Bimbijy station, 400 km from Perth on a good road all the way, we have reserved some tent sites and use of the kitchen from Monday 2 September (cost \$3 per night). Over 70 species have been seen here and a stay of at least three days is recommended.

Please ring Diane by 25 July if at all interested (381 9035) weekdays).

Later in August you will need to obtain from the Office the details of the Saturday morning rendezvous at Petrudor Rock.

Organizer: Diane Beckingham.

Sunday, September 8: Tomato Lake (MBP)

Meet at 2pm in Scenic Drive, Kewdale.

Saturday, September 14: Seabird Trip

Another exciting escapade beyond Rottnest. Bookings with Steve Keeling on 291 7592 by 31 August. Cost \$30; minimum 'crew' of 20, maximum of 24.

Another seabird trip is proposed for late November.

Saturday, September 14: Mogumber/Moore R. (RAOU Day Trip)

Meet at 0830 at the Bindoon Hotel carpark, Great Northern Highway, just past Bindoon. A round trip of about 280km from GPO Perth. Nesting bush-birds and waterbirds.

Sunday, September 22: Bayswater Bird Sanctuary

Joint excursion of the MBP and the Recreation Association for the Disabled of W.A.

CHECK THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE FOR DETAILS OF EVENTS FROM SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER.

MEETING REPORTS

A large assemblage of members and friends gathered at the Wildlife Centre on 25 March to hear **Dr Hsu Weishu** speak about birds and bird study in China. Dr Hsu is Associate Professor at the Peking Natural History Museum and Deputy Secretary-General of the Ornithological Society of China.

In his most absorbing address, Dr Hsu spoke of research on rare birds such as the Crested Ibis, Siberian White Crane and many species of pheasants. Loss of habitat and hunting have affected many species, but increasing public awareness has been of benefit to researchers and conservation agencies. The "Love the Bird Week" was one strategy used by the government to educate children about birds and their conservation.

Being such a large country, China encompasses tropical, temperate, desert and high latitude environments with a corresponding broad diversity of bird species. Dr Hsu presented slides of a selection of species and bird haunts such as the gull colonies in Sechwan and crane refuge at Zhalong in Manchuria.

The governments of Australia and the People's Republic of China are currently negotiating a treaty to protect birds which migrate between these two countries. Waders such as the Marsh Sandpiper, Eastern Curlew and Asian Dowitcher breed in the Zhalong Reserve prior to visiting Australia each year.

Dr Hsu was able to visit much of the south-west and also experience wader concentrations in the Pilbara and near Broome during his stay in W.A. His friendly nature and interest in our birds, research organisations and country won him many friends.

EXCURSION REPORTS

Campout at Goodale Sanctuary: 2-3 March

On our morning excursion to Lake McLarty we had twenty or more wader-watchers in tight formation with telescopes poised as we had been forewarned of the chance of seeing something unusual. We were rewarded with the very special sighting of ten Oriental Pratincoles feeding on insects at the muddy lake's edge. We observed a total of 60 other species including Marsh, Wood, Pectoral, Sharp-tailed and Curlew Sandpipers.

At Lake Mealup the mud was as usual deep and squelchy, the scenery was picturesque and numerous water birds were feeding serenely at the north-west corner. Thirty-five Great Egrets and 15 Yellow-billed Spoonbills continued to feed as we approached close enough for photos. We noted 43 species including Sacred, Straw-necked and Glossy Ibis and the three species of grebe.

The Goodale Sanctuary was a pleasant and convenient overnight base and around the lake we saw 55 of the 104 species so far recorded here. It was a delight to watch the colony of breeding Darters and the last two observers to leave sighted the Black Bittern as it flew off at their approach.

Near the south-east corner of the Harvey Nature Reserve a Peregrine Falcon was observed through a scope in the early morning and numerous Stubble Quail were flushed at the Drain nearby.

We extend thanks to the Goodales for the use of their Sanctuary and to John Hansen for his leadership and navigation.

D. Beckingham

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY REPORT 3, 1981-1983

This report is the last report that will be prepared by Peter Congreve and is a fitting memorial to the effort that he and Di put into Eyre. The bird list now stands at 211 species and makes interesting reading. This alone would justify obtaining a copy.

Reading on, there are details of observations on Malleefowl followed by details of birds banded and retrapped. These reports are now showing something of the biology of the birds of this habitat. Details are given of the wader counts along Kanidil Beach. There is a mass of information here that requires further study to point the way for future research.

The second half of the report is a series of papers; Stephen Davies discusses sand dune stabilisation; Peter Congreve writes about wing moult in honeyeaters; he joins with Di and Stephen Davies on censusing at Eyre and with Stephen Ambrose on nesting of the Welcome Swallow. Finally Stephen Ambrose presents some of his work on the White-browed Scrub-wren. These papers contain something for everyone and are a cross section of the work at the Observatory.

Then there are a few short reports on some of the courses run in 82/83 and finally the latest in the Dunny saga — a must for the affectionado. Mike Bamford's endplate of a Blue-breasted Fairy-wren deserves wider viewing.

This report, like Eyre itself, gives pleasure to the birdwatcher and to the student of birds, while showing how much more we have to learn. Thank you Peter and Di and goodluck Nick for the next. Copies of this report can be obtained from the R.A.O.U. offices or from Eyre. Cost: \$5 plus postage.

SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by Field Officer, Roger Jaensch

1. Survey at Dumbleyung Lake

Located in the southern wheatbelt east of Wagin, Dumbleyung Lake is a salty lake covering an area **twelve kilometres in length** and up to eight kilometres wide. Parts of the edge of the basin

are steep and rocky, offering little to interest hungry waterbirds. In fact, most of the wetland consists of deep, exposed waters, only suitable for loafing by rafts of ducks and diving birds.

Flowing into the south-eastern part of the lake, the **Coblinine River** provides most of Dumbleyung's water volume. The river mouth and nearby shallows are studded with dead trees and samphire which create an extensive sheltered environment for feeding.

Although Donald Campbell once used the lake for speed-boat trials, it has experienced many long shallow or dry periods. Dumbleyung Lake has **only overflowed on a handful of occasions** in this century. The most recent spill was in November 1983, due to the boost from floods in January 1982. At this time a maximum depth of 4.45 metres was recorded by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

We might expect such a large dry-season wetland to be an important refuge for waterbirds, but data has been patchy because surveys have been hampered by the enormity of the task.

A **team of 15 observers** gathered at the Ski Club ramp on 30 March 1985 to attempt to improve our understanding of the value of the lake for waterbirds. Using three boats with outboards and three shore-based parties, approximately one third of the wetland was inspected. This area comprised the most useful waterbird habitats at Dumbleyung Lake.

Conditions were warm and breezy, but the hardy teams accounted for **25,000 birds** altogether, a total second only to peaks of 40,000 (Peel Inlet) recorded earlier in the Waterbird Project. Eurasian Coots (10,500) and Grey Teal (7,000) were the most abundant species.

Four species were added to the list for Dumbleyng Lake, namely Freckled Duck, Black-fronted Plover, Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper. The latter entertained us during our luncheon gathering but was not seen subsequently! Freckled Ducks had been reported prior to the Project.

The **species tally** for Dumbleyung now stands at 36, not far behind other well known important sites in the wheatbelt (Beverley Lakes 41, Toolibin Lakes 40 species).

Totals for 19 species were the highest to date at this site (during the Project). **The count of 475 White-faced Herons is possibly the highest ever recorded for this species at one site in the south-west.** Great Egrets (76) were widely spread around the shores and higher totals over the last four years have only been made at Peel and Vasse Estuaries.

Sightings of the Freckled Duck, Blue-billed Duck and Wood Sandpiper were especially interesting as these species generally prefer fresh water environments.

Special thanks are due to Ray Garstone and Grant Pearson for organising the boats and Mal Graham for his excellent map. Mention should be given to Bruce and Anne Buchanan for their fabulous fruit cake — commiserations for the tricky creek-crossing! Others participating were Ben Carr, Wayne Zadow, Brian Wooldridge, Jane Nurick, Ian Standring, Bev Wilcox, Doug Watkins, Peter & Di Congreve, Edna Milne and the Field Officer. All such exercises are open to all takers!

It is now clear that Dumbleyung Lake is **among the most important wetlands** in terms of waterbird usage, in the greater south-west region.

2. Crake and rail trapping

Following successful operations at Thomsons Lake in early 1983 when 34 birds of four species were caught, another programme was organised in February-March 1985. The lake had dried too far by the time we were prepared for action in 1984 and our timing was almost too late again in 1985.

Exploiting concentrations of crakes and rails in the muddy edges of rush-beds, trapping efforts were made daily between 27 February and 8 March. Most of the work was performed by **Pauline Clay**, with some help from Doug Watkins, Nick Dymond, Janet and Lynn Pedler (S.A.) and the Field Officer. Actually, we owe all credit to Pauline whose enthusiasm caused the exercise to get off the ground in 1985.

Our catch comprised:

Spotless Crake	— 16
Australian Crake	— 1
Baillon's Crake	— 1
Buff-banded Rail	— 1
Total	19

In 1983 we experienced similar proportions in the species caught.

All birds were trapped in the heavy triangular wire mesh walk-in traps used in 1983. More than half were snared after observers walked toward the traps through the rushes. Plastic drift-line fences (gutter-guard) were used to divert birds to the trap entries and although only 18 cm high, were almost as successful as the taller fences used previously.

Only five of the 19 birds (26%) were obvious immatures, all being Spotless Crakes. These were recognised by whiter throats and duller legs than adults and sometimes sheaths at the bases of breast or wing feathers. Non-flying runners comprised 44% of the catch in 1983 (none in 1985), although the trapping was closer to nesting times in that year.

In 1985, all crakes and rails were caught in beds of bulrush *Typha* with clumps of spike-rush *Baumea articulata*.

The exercise again proved its value in adding undetected species to waterbird counts and confirming the numerical dominance of Spotless Crakes (assuming species equally catchable). Techniques for catching crakes and rails have been refined through these exercises so that more organised collection of biological data from these birds can be attempted in coming seasons.

3. Vasse-Wonnerup Estuary

Many birds will be familiar in a superficial way with the Vasse-Wonnerup Estuary system near Busselton. However, its real importance for waterbirds is only revealed when water remains in the shallows well into autumn — as in 1985.

Intensive observations and counts by Brad Kneebone on 9 February 1985 produced some especially interesting results.

Counts of Black Swan (1244), Grey Teal (3970), Pacific Black Duck (2768) and Yellow-billed Spoonbill (22) were top figures for this wetland to date. Totals for Pacific Black Duck and Great Egret were the fourth highest and Great Egret third highest for those species in the Project.

Thirty species were listed on 9 February '85, totalling a record for this wetland of 15,600 birds.

4. Send in your data

Would all observers please send in any outstanding data IMMEDIATELY as we must finalise the survey information by mid-June. Data received later **may not be considered** in the final report of the Waterbird Project 1981-85, which should be completed by December 1985.

5. Ongoing Monitoring of Selected Wetland Nature Reserves

A proposal has been submitted to the Department of Conservation and Land Management for funding to enable the RAOU to **carry on a waterbird programme at certain wetlands**. This awaits the approval of the Director and Minister, but we are confident that it has every chance of success.

All going well, we would be able to monitor waterbird usage at important wetland nature reserves and reserves with management problems, **for another five years**. This short list would certainly include Peel Inlet, Vasse Estuary, Bengier Swamp, Forrestdale Lake, Thomsons Lake and others in Tables 1 and 3 (pp 7 & 8) of last newsletter, as well as Beverley Lakes, Namming Reserve, Lake Muir reserves and some lakes around Esperance.

We would also have the **capacity to process data for any reserves that observers are keen to continue to visit on a two monthly basis**. Although we have an excellent set of information from the past three to four years, many patterns will only become evident from ten or more years of data.

Any person either currently involved in the Waterbird Project or totally unfamiliar, should **contact me if interested** in this valuable management-oriented monitoring programme.

METRO BIRDER NEWS

CONTENTS

Herdsman Meeting a Success
Preliminary Analysis Shows Interesting Results
NEW RECOMMENDED SURVEY DATES
Domestic Ducks — Sorting Out The Species
Rainbow Lorikeets — How Many Are There?

Similar Species — New Atlas Numbers
HINTS — On Surveys, Form Filling and
Form Supply
Feature YOUR site
Excursions Report



Photo by Eric Van Delft

HERDSMAN MEETING A SUCCESS

Ninety-five people participated in the first meeting of Metro Birders held at the Herdsman Wildlife Centre. Many people doing regular surveys in the same vicinity met for the first time and exchanged stories and information.

I would like to thank those who attended and the people who provided constructive comments.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS SHOWS INTERESTING RESULTS

Four hundred and twenty seven computer forms covering 125 sites between October and March formed the basis of the first

preliminary analysis. A full description of the analysis was given at the meeting and some highlights are noted below.

—The Australian Raven and Australian Magpie were recorded in over 75% of all surveys. Only 15% of surveys noted the 40th most often recorded species, the Splendid Fairy-wren.

—A clear difference in species present was noted between Coastal Plain and Darling Range sites. For example the Singing Honeyeater was recorded in 71% of Coastal Plain surveys but in only 1% of Darling Range surveys.

—Some mapping was done, which showed that the Grey Fantail was recorded less often in inner suburban surveys than outer suburban surveys.

The analysis clearly shows that A FULL TWELVE MONTH SURVEY is required to show seasonal and migratory trends. Further funding is being sought to achieve a full twelve month survey AND full analysis of the data. It is intended to provide Field Record Cards and Computer Forms so that all sites have twelve months of records even if further funding is not received.

Computer printouts are now available for all sites which have observers. An example of a computer printout is shown below.

(The table shows the number of surveys that recorded the species).

(Number of surveys in month) 3 2 2 1 1

(Month : 1 = Jan, 12 = Dec) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

(Atlas

No. of

species)

SPC

56 Dusky Moorhen	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
58 Purple Swamphen	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
59 Eurasian Coot	3	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1

NEW RECOMMENDED SURVEY DATES

In choosing the original survey dates a regular 4 weekly survey was proposed as months tend to be different lengths. However the data analysis program was easier to develop using the system of months rather than weeks. Therefore the recommended survey period has been changed to

THE FIRST WEEK IN EVERY MONTH

Please mark your calendar accordingly!

DOMESTIC DUCKS—SORTING OUT THE SPECIES

An excellent discussion on this topic was given by Mandy Silberstein and her real LIVE Domestic/Native Hybrid Duck at the Metro Birders Meeting.

This has resulted in 3 categories of duck being given Metro Bird Project Atlas Numbers for the Computer Form.

The numbers and categories:

817 **Muscovy Duck**—A pure white duck with red around its eyes. This IS a variety of Domestic Duck.

948 **Domestic Duck**—This category includes ALL sorts of domestic ducks such as Mallards, Khaki Campbells and everything in between.

816 **Domestic/Native Hybrid Duck**—These ducks are important to note. Most hybrids are a cross between a Pacific Black Duck and a Domestic Duck. Mallards in particular are noted for interbreeding and in the eastern states are reducing the number of true Pacific Black Duck significantly. The field guide by Simpson and Day provides an illustration of Mallard and the Domestic/Native Hybrid Duck. Its field characteristics are:

- looks similar to a Pacific Black Duck but it is LARGER and the EYEBROW is slightly shorter, thinner and lighter
- the bird usually has ORANGE LEGS

Metro Birders on wetlands are asked to count these 3 types of duck in their June, September and December surveys if possible.

RAINBOW LORIKEETS—Metro Birders who record Rainbow Lorikeets are also asked to count the number of birds seen in June, September and December surveys. Please note your count in the comments section of the Computer Form.

ATLAS NUMBERS FOR SIMILAR SPECIES

811 **Small Unidentified Grebe**—The Australasian and Hoary-headed Grebes are often difficult to tell apart in the non-breeding season.

Participants in the Waterbird Project should note that this number (811) must now be used instead of 820.

271 **Little Corella**—Note that all Corellas in W.A. are now considered to be one or other subspecies of the Little Corella.

819 **Bronze-Cuckoo sp.**—The immature Horsefield's and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo are difficult to tell apart.

HINTS FOR SURVEYS, FORM FILLING AND FORMS SUPPLY

Bushbirds—at this time of year listen and look for a feeding flock and follow them.

Waterbirds — sit and watch them! Count them if you like.

Birds that fly over — record them but MAKE A NOTE in the comments section of the Computer Form if the species would not normally be expected at your site.

Please check your entries and fill in the computer forms ACROSS the page, not down.

A species query form has been designed for records which I would like to verify with you.

I do attempt to keep records of what I send and what I receive so that when I receive your second last form I can send you some more cards and forms. The system doesn't always work. Please tell me if you have too few or too many forms. To save postage I send packs of 7 cards and forms.

Please send your computer forms in about every second month on every even month if possible.

FEATURE YOUR SITE

The Metro Bird Project also aims to increase awareness of birds in the Metropolitan Area by holding bird walks on sites that have a reasonable range of birds (ie about 17 or more per survey). If your site fits into this category perhaps a bird walk to raise community awareness of your site may be valuable for its preservation. Please contact the office if you would like to arrange a bird walk at your site.

EXCURSIONS REPORT

Five Metro Bird Project walks were held between February and the middle of May. The bird walks were evenly distributed through the Metropolitan area, covering Kings Park, Alfred Cove, Whiteman Park, Mary Carrol Park and John Forrest National Park.

The number of people attending ranged from 20 to 50 according to the timing and publicity. Future Metro Bird Project bird walks will be on Sunday afternoons at interesting wetland sites.

I would like to thank those RAOU members who share their enthusiasm with the newcomers to birding. Getting new members is important to the RAOU. Fortunately most bird walks have recorded interesting birds, delighting both RAOU members and newcomers!

Particular thanks must go to Andrew Tanner who ably led the Whiteman Park Excursion for me, to Peter Curry for showing the inner sanctons of his piece of bushland and Joy Hutching for her guidance around Mary Carrol Park.

The Whiteman Park walk carried on to the Ballajura Lakes which are proving to be very interesting for ducks and waders.

Metro bird walks will be held about once every month during the winter. I look forward to your company. Ron Van Delft.

OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and will receive further scrutiny before they are considered for the 1984 and 1985 Bird Reports for W.A. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. Individual observers will be acknowledged in the Bird Reports.

This series mainly covers **December 1984 and January-May 1985**. Bold type indicates wetlands under study in the Waterbird Project. Shire names are given in brackets.

1. South-West & Eucla Divisions

- Great Crested Grebe — 1, near **Pt Waylen** (Metro), 1/3: first record for this site in Waterbird Proj.
- Giant-Petrel species — 1, 18/3, Rottneest crossing.
- Australian Pelican — 11, 25/2, Little Norring L (Wagin).
- Little Black Cormorant — 200, Gairdner R near Qualup (Jeramungup), 26/12.
- Pacific Heron — 1, 19/4, Pipidinny Rd, near Yanchep: few reports at this time of year.
- Great Egret — 56, 13/4, **Chittering L** (Chittering): peak count for this site.
- Little Bittern — 1 male flushed from muddy beds of rush, 27/2, **Thomsons L** (Cockburn): a late date for this species in the South-West.
- Black Bittern — 1, Jan 85, Blackwood River near Mayanup (Boyup Brook): further upstream than on previous occasions.
— 1, 26/2, Blackwood R near Sue's Bridge.
- Australasian Bittern — 1 calling, 4/12, **Bokarup Sw** (Cranbrook): ~~new locality for this species.~~
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill — 60+, 17/4, **Crackers Sw** (Dandaragan): largest concentration ever recorded in the south of WA?
- Freckled Duck — 27, 29/12, including two sets of young, **Wannamal L** (Gingin).
— 2, 16/3 & 13/4, **Chittering L** (Chittering).
— 2, 9/5, **Woody L** (Esperance): first report from this shire in the Waterbird Project.
- Grey Teal — 6000, 18/3, **Wardering L** (Woodanilling).
- Blue-billed Duck — 2 ducklings about 10cm long, 12/3, Tomato L (Metro).
- Square-tailed Kite — Kununurra, March.
- Peregrine Falcon — 1, 1/3, **McLarty L** (Murray): trying to pick up a dying Coot on the water . . . without luck.
- Brown Quail — 4, 3/5, adjacent Mill Brook Nature Res (Albany).
- Buff-banded Rail — 2, 15/12, at farmhouse near Woodanilling, with six newly-hatched runners.
— 1, 14/5, crossing Norseman Rd at **Shark L** (Esperance): at midday. Possibly interested in road-killed miners.
- Baillon's Crake — 4, **Thomsons L** (Cockburn), 23/2.
- Spotless Crake — 25, 14/3, **Grasmere L** (Albany): a record count for the Waterbird Project.
- Black-tailed Native-hen — 3, 30/4, L Claremont (Metro).
— 37, 12/5, **Bambun L** (Gingin): an unusual time of year to appear at this site.

- Coot — 2 chicks 15cm long, Tomato L, 12/3: unusually late breeding.
- Red-kneed Dotterel — 150, 25/11, **White Water L** (Corrigin): Previous max concentration in Waterbird Project was 34!
— 42, **Big White L** (Narrogin), 10/1.
— 1, 14/3, **Shaster L** (Ravensthorpe).
- Large Sand Plover — 400, 24/2, **White Water and Brown Ls** (Corrigin).
- Red-capped Plover — 53, 17/4, **Crackers Sw** (Dandaragan): max count from Waterbird Proj sites.
- Black-fronted Plover — 2, 10/2, **Peel Inlet East** (Murray).
— 8, 2/4, **Thomsons L**.
— 1, 12/5, **Thomsons L**.
— 3, 29/4 & 8/5, **Thomsons L**: these are fairly late dates for these three species.
- Eastern Curlew — 1, 10/3, S of L Coogee (Metro).
— 1, 11/3, **Guraga L** (Dandaragan).
— 6, 2/3, **Warden L** (Esperance). These are all new localities for this species.
- Wood Sandpiper — 1, 2/3, **Warden L**: new locality.
- Marsh Sandpiper — 1, 17/4, **Crackers Sw** (Dandaragan): new locality.
- Black-tailed Godwit — 4, 12/5, **Thomsons L**: unusually late.
- Pectoral Sandpiper — a bird seen at Stokes Inlet (Esperance) on 23/4 was almost certainly this very rare Aust vagrant. The bird was in advanced breeding dress and was described in detail.
- Long-toed Stint — 3, 16/3, **Jandabup L** (Wanneroo).
— 1, 18/3, Rottneest crossing.
- Dunlin — 1, 25/3, James St breakwater, Esperance. A rare species in WA.
- Oriental Pratincole — 574, 4/5, **Peel Inlet East**: second highest count for the Waterbird Project.
- Pomarine Jaeger — 1, 3/4, **Mullet L** (Esperance): new to the Esperance district.
- Kelp Gull — a flock at **Thomsons L** comprised 40 birds on 18/3, 60-80 on 29/4 & 22 on 8/5: many had developed full breeding dress by April. This is the largest concentration in the Waterbird Project so far.
- Whiskered Tern — a juvenile bird landed on a boat off Garden Island in exhausted condition on 13/4.
- White-winged Tern — daily flights of 8-10 birds from the scarp to woodlands near the South-West Hwy, near Mundijong, 22-24/3.
- Bridled Tern — 3, 3/4, Kalamunda: many reports in the metro area at this time.
- Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo — 10, 30 km N of the coast in a small patch of yates in heathland, 53 km NW of Esperance.
- Purple-crowned Lorikeet — 6, 24/2, Garden Island: hot, clear weather; flying with Tree Martins.
- Regent Parrot — 1 + 6 + 5, 17/4, **Crackers Sw** and **Guraga L** (Dandaragan): flying into NE wind with huge masses of Tree Martins.
- Fork-tailed Swift — Pipidinny Rd., near Yanchep, 27/4.
- Crested Bellbird — 38, 4/12, **Benger Sw** (Harvey).
- Clamorous Reed-Warbler —

- Little Grassbird — 10, 12/4, Garrett Rd Marshes (metro): in samphire and *Juncus kraussii* near the antenna.
- Tawny-crowned Honeyeater — 5, 3/4, Murdoch University.
- Red-browed Firetail — 5, 18/4, Helena Valley.
- Spotted Bowerbird — common but localised, Warrambidge, 100 km S of Wiluna.
- Aust Magpie-lark — Note: last record from Rottneest not 1936 as stated in last issue . . . one seen 14/4/81.
- Australian Magpie — 10 chasing two White-faced Herons, 20/4, Piesse Brook.

2. The North

- Darter — recorded 4-7 April, Poona & Aga Khan mines, 77 km NW of Cue.
- Garganey — 1 male, L Eda (E of Broome), late March.
- Little Button-quail — nest with eggs, 4/4, Kununurra. Also many small immatures.
- Little Curlew — in tens of thousands, Roebuck Plains, March — April.
- Redshank — odd birds scattered along the North-West coast during Wader Studies Expedition, March-April.
- Spotted Nightjar — hundreds along Gibb R Rd between King Leopold Ras & Derby, 7/4 : often 10 in car lights at once. A similar event along the Fitzroy Rd at the same time.
- Blue-winged Kookaburra — Jan 85, 'Hillside', SW of Marble Bar.
- Barn Swallow — Cooke Point (Hedland), 4-6 Jan. — Derby, March.
- Rufous Fantail — 1, 29/3, in mangroves at Wyndham.
- Chestnut Quail-thrush — 77 km NW of Cue, 4-7 April : not recorded here during the Atlas.
- Zitting Cisticola — nest with eggs, 25/3, flats near Wyndham : first breeding record for WA.
- Green-backed Warbler — 2, 24/3, in thick riverside timber near Kununurra.
- Pied Honeyeater — 21-25 Jan, Port & South Hedland : the birds stayed only briefly.

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

SEABIRDING

Well, if you were not one of the 22 'real' birds on the seabird extravaganza in mid-April then you really missed out. No it wasn't sea-sickness and boredom you missed, it was the fantastic weather, stimulating company and most importantly, brilliant birding (perhaps you saw some of the photos in the *West Australian*).

The most interesting and exciting observations were of large numbers (100+) of Wilson's Storm-Petrels. These beautiful "sea-swallows" flew in close to the boat in numbers up to eight at a time. The birds were probably on their north-ward migration to the seas off north-western and northern Australia. To our knowledge this is the first time that large numbers have been recorded off Rottneest.

Gripping views were had of both Arctic Jaegers and Great Skuas. The Arctic Jaegers made captivating watching as they ambushed Silver Gulls near North Mole. At times, unfortunate Silver Gulls were being harassed by three Arctic Jaegers, attempting to get them to regurgitate their last meal. One of the Great Skuas was keeping an eye on the Carl Vincent anchored in Gauge Roads, and the other was seen off Rottneest.

Several Fleshy-footed and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters were seen. One species was most notable by its absence. Only one Australian Gannet was observed compared to 150+ on the seabird trip last year in September.

On the way back we stopped off at Rottneest for an hour to visit the Bakery and have a quick look at the lakes. A very enjoyable day was had by all. Our thanks go to Steve Keeling for organising the outing and to him and Peter Curry for putting names on many of the dark blobs flying around.

Steve Keeling is organising a third outing on 14 September. Come along to hand feed Albies and be swooped by "sea-swallows". It will be a great day. (P.S. sea-sick tablets work very well: only one breakfast lost after 40 person-trips).

Doug Watkins

WREN REPLY

As the person who wrote the piece on the Splendid Fairy-wren in the *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds (RDCBAB)*, I feel I must respond to Lee Hassan's comments under "Fearless Fairy-wrens" (*WA Bird Notes* 33). I still hold to my suggestion that Superb and Splendid Fairy-wrens are vastly different in their ability to adapt to human habitation. Whilst I do not doubt the veracity of Lee's observations for a moment (and I envy her, her wrens), I would suggest she enjoy them to the full whilst they are still with her.

The comparison between Superb and Splendid Fairy-wrens that I was making in *RDCBAB* (what a title!) is really one between the different ways in which the species react to human suburbia.

When I was last in Canberra three years ago, I was amazed to find that the Campus of the National University, which ten years ago was a biological desert, was now home to one of the densest populations of fairy-wrens that I have ever seen. They have effectively colonised the new habitat created by large plantings of Cotoneaster bushes and happily forage over the lawns in-between.

In contrast, as Perth develops the Splendid Fairy-wren does tend to shrink-back into those areas of native heathland and bush that are left. A classic example is *King's Park* which would appear ideal for wrens but where a (re?) introduction programme was not a success. I know of no suburban park or garden other than places like Lee's at Carmel or that of a friend of mine in Boya (which are really only "fringe-suburbia") that still have Splendid Fairy-wrens as regular commensals. I would not expect to find them there in five years time because when disasters (cats!) occur there will be neither a convenient reservoir of wrens nor the colonising urge, to repopulate where disaster struck (even if the cat is R.I.P.).

Sorry to be so pessimistic Lee: I hope you will prove me wrong.

Ian Rowley

53 Swan Street, Guildford, W.A. 6055

ABOUT TERNS

(This poem was written to the tune of Galway Bay, and could possibly be sung to it. Even better if whistled to it, perhaps)

If you ever go across the sea to Rottneest,
In August, or July, or June, or May;
You must ask your God to do you a big favour,
And grant unto you, at least one cloudless day.

For on such a day you'll hear Crested Terns a 'screechin',
High in the sky and almost out of sight.
And as you watch, you'll see precision flying,
Of two Crested Terns engaged in courtship flight.

Now that's the time to put aside your binocs
Because if you use them, you will surely learn,
That as you watch that aerial spectacular,
You'll never know which way those terns will turn.

With their wings raked back, they fly in tight formation,
They dive and bank and turn and you will find,
That altho' you know they are two separate bodies,
You'll be thinking they are controlled by just one mind.

Now you might say you've seen it on the T.V.,
And that is something about which I would not bet;
But until you've seen it live on God's big wide screen,
Without commercials — then you ain't seen nuthin' yet.

Jack Donohoe

SNIPES SNIPPETS

I have recently been sent a copy of an excellent paper dealing with identification of Swinhoe's Snipe and Pin-tailed Snipe (courtesy David Eades). Snipe enthusiasts should contact me if they want to see the article.

Taylor, P.B. 1984 Field identification of Pintail Snipe and recent records in Kenya. *Dutch Birding* 6: 77-90.

Taylor's conclusions tally closely with Australian observations except for his comments on lack of calls given by Swinhoe's when they are flushed (see p.7, issue 33 of *W.A. Bird Notes*). Australian birds are often silent, but equally often give a nasal call of some sort. The paper also indicates that colours of bills and legs may be useful characteristics.

It is imperative that meticulous notes be taken of every aspect of plumage and behaviour of snipe, especially colours and proportions of tails and feet during flight. Trailing feet seen from side-on and spread tails before landing are most useful items to look for.

Roger Jaensch

NOTICES

1. Noisy Scrub-birds : Translocation Project

Following the successful translocation of Noisy Scrub-birds to Mt Manypeaks last year, the Department of Conservation and Land Management will attempt another such exercise in the coming winter. ~~Wildlife Officer Graeme Folley~~ requires volunteers to assist with this vital operation which is designed to improve the security of existence of this endangered species.

Anyone interested in helping for a week or more in July-August 1985 should contact Graeme Folley at Two People's Bay Nature Reserve, RMB 8609, Two People's Bay, via Albany 6330 ('phone 098 464 276, evenings only).

2. Bird Photography Group

A fair number of members of the RAOU also seem to be keen photographers. Would any of these members be interested in forming a Bird Photographic Section? If so, please contact Brian Tullis on 293 1155.

Possible goals of this group would be:

- * assisting each other to improve skills;
- * arranging an exhibition;
- * organising workshops or lectures by established wildlife photographers;
- * compiling a photographic index of high quality photographs on behalf of the RAOU.

3. Observer wanted at Capel

Associated Minerals Consolidated have been extracting minerals from sand deposits near Capel since 1956. A series of small wetlands has been created by the mining process and these are being developed to become more attractive for waterbirds.

An observer is needed for a programme of monitoring waterbird usage of these wetlands on a monthly basis. The Company is willing to pay travelling allowance to the observer. Naturally a resident of the Capel-Bunbury district would be preferable, but an observer based further afield would also be suitable.

If interested, please contact Roger Jaensch at the RAOU office on 364 6202 (9-5) IMMEDIATELY. The first survey is to be in June.

4. Birding Tours

Coates Tours have a tempting itinerary of tours in the coming months. These include:

- Kimberley-Kakadu : July 5-27 or August 4
- Mt Augustus : August 12-21
- Flinders Ranges, S.A. : August 29-September 17
- Kalbarri-Murchison R. : September 23-30

If interested in these events, contact Kevin and Yvonne Coate, 21 Acanthus Road, Willetton 6155 (phone 457 1515).

5. Valuable wetland for sale

One of the last large areas of undisturbed wetland on the coastal plain, Lake Mealup, has been placed on the market. There are four blocks, totalling 400 acres, of which about 175 acres are perennial swamp, the balance being the original tuart and banksia forest. A further 40 acres of swamp reserve is surrounded by these blocks.

Lake Mealup is situated on the eastern side of the Harvey Inlet, and although only 115 km from Perth (90 minutes), it is surprisingly isolated. It is renowned for its range of waterbirds, but also supports a wide variety of bushbirds and raptors. It is an important breeding area for the Regent Parrot (Smokers). In fact, it is a treasure, and losing it to agriculture would be a tragedy.

I would like to hear from people interested in forming a partnership to purchase and run Lake Mealup as a wildlife sanctuary. My suggestion is that there be 100 shares, costing up to \$1,500 each. This should be the maximum: the final cost may be less, although the owner actually wants more.

If you are interested, please write to me, c/- R.A.O.U. Office. As I will be on holiday from 1st to 21st June, Roger Jaensch will be able to provide further information.

Jock McLaren

6. Study Tour, south-west corner of W.A. : 9-24 September 1985

With Stephen Davies, Director RAOU.

Features:

- * Herdsman Lake Reserve in Perth
- * Yanchep National Park with Peter Congreve
- * Middlesex Field Study Centre (Manjimup)
- * Stirling Range and Fitzgerald River National Parks
- * Eyre Bird Observatory

Air and coach travel with hotel accommodation and camping. Cost: \$1450 per person (Concession \$1340), ex-Perth & return.

For further information:

COUNCIL OF ADULT EDUCATION

Phone: (03) 652 0737

256 Flinders Street

Melbourne 3000

7. Calling all candid cameras

This is a notice of early warning to all photographers. It has been suggested that slides of "interesting moments in bird-watching" be shown at the Annual Dinner as an item of entertainment. This would probably take the form of a competition. Check later issues of this newsletter for confirmation.

8. Wanted — birdwatchers in the Pilbara

The Cossack Restoration and Development Association is seeking our help in compiling a Flora and Fauna Register of the historic port and town of Cossack in the shire of Roebourne. Members who may have records of birds in the area or who may be travelling there in the near future are asked to send their bird lists and notes to the Association for use in producing the Register.

The address is: **Mr D.J. Lane**, Secretary, Cossack Restoration and Development Association Inc, P.O. Box 311, Wickham, W.A. 6720.

9. Our place at Canning Bridge

The physical focal point of the R.A.O.U. in Western Australia is the office at 15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge. This is financed by the national body and from the grants it receives for the special projects undertaken in the state — the South-West Waterbird and the Metropolitan Bird Projects. The W.A. Group supports it with a small monetary donation but mainly by providing volunteer labour in staffing it and in assisting the project officers.

The growth in birdwatching and in R.A.O.U. membership in W.A. is largely due to these surveys and the earlier Bird Atlas project. They have encouraged amateur birdwatchers to enlarge their knowledge of birds and at the same time have given them specific goals and introduced them to others with like interests. Thus R.A.O.U. and its nationwide structure has provided the opportunity for this to come about.

It is to be hoped that as the present surveys draw to a close, new ones will be approved and financed so that our office can be maintained. In the meantime, **more volunteers are needed** to help in the office, answering the telephone, typing and photocopying letters and documents, sorting record sheets and posting out the newsletter. If you can help on a casual or regular basis one morning or afternoon a week, please let **Barbara Hale** know, phone 386 5640.

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

June 8	Excursion/MBP walk: Swanbourne/L. Claremont.
June 22	Excursion: Tutanning/Pingelly district.
June 24	Meeting.
June 29	Excursion Leadership Workshop.
June 30	MBP walk: Lake Monger.

July 21	MBP walk: Pinnaroo Valley.
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August 4	MBP walk: Manning Lake.
August 5	Meeting.
August 17	Excursion: nature reserves near York.
School holidays — possibly Rottneest campout.	

August 31-	
September 5	CAMP-OUT: Petrudor/Bimbijy.
September 8	MBP walk: Tomato Lake.
September 14	Seabird Trip.
September 14	Excursion: Mogumber/Moore River.
September 22	MBP/RADWA Bayswater Sanctuary.
September 30	Meeting.

YOUR 1985 COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Barbara Hale	Committee:	Brian Collins
Vice-Chairman:	Rosalind Denny		John Hansen
Secretary:	Shapelle McNee		Bob Goodale
Treasurer:	Clive Napier		Joan Seabrook
			Geoff Shannon
			Mandy Silberstein

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
☆ <i>Overlays for the Atlas</i>	\$ 6.00
☆ <i>Methods of Censusing Birds in Australia</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>Bird Report for W.A. — 1982</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>Report of the Middlesex Study Centre</i>	\$ 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
☆ <i>Every Australian Bird Illustrated</i>	\$22.00
☆ <i>In Quest of Bowerbirds</i> by N. Chaffer	\$26.00
☆ <i>New Zealand Birds</i> —excellent photographs	\$17.00
☆ <i>Eyre Report : 1981-83</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>1985 RAOU Calendars</i>	\$ 8.00
☆ <i>Bird-call tapes</i>	\$ 9.00
☆ <i>RAOU ties</i> (navy-blue or maroon with silver emus)	\$10.00
☆ <i>RAOU emu badges</i>	\$ 3.00
☆ <i>Western Australian Bird Notes</i>	\$1.50 for each issue

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

- *Birding in WA*: New Members 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.

EYRE COURSES

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

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 September issue — third Friday in July
for December issue — third Friday in October