



Western Australian Bird Notes

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Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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SPECTACLE AT LE LIEVRE SWAMP

On the weekend of May 10-11, Dot Kingston, Gail Hooper and I set out on another attempt to find Le Lievre Swamp (between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing), which although marked on maps and in the road atlas was unknown to the locals, even those who actually resided on Liveringa Station where it was supposedly situated. A previous trip had been unsuccessful, although we had found Moulamen Swamp and in the process three Yellow Chats which made the weekend worthwhile.

Armed with the best map we could procure (printed in 1974) we set out from Blina Swamp via Erskine Bore, only to discover that the tracks marked on our map no longer existed, and new fences were erected across the places we felt we wanted to go. Nevertheless we set off at various tangents, often across country, to try and find a way towards our goal.

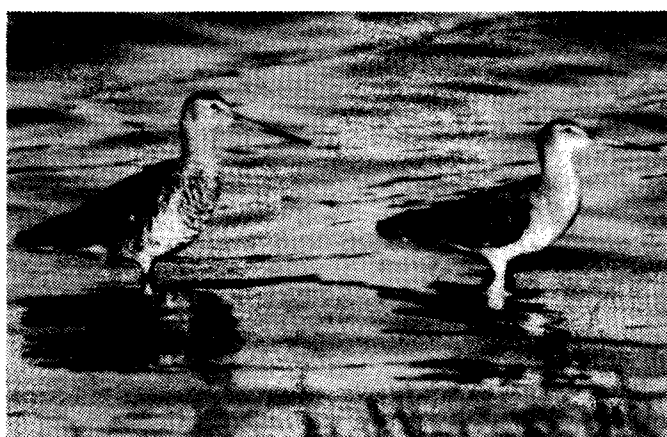
After bouncing over rutted ground, through head high grass for a long time we finally located the swamp and the whole project became infinitely worthwhile. The swamp and lake area is very large, roughly 22 kilometres in circumference, and it teemed with birds. We estimated that we saw about 40,000 birds on our trek round the area, most of them waterbirds. For example: about 20,000 Plumed Whistling Ducks, huge rafts of birds that stretched for hundreds of metres; 5,000 Wandering Whistling Duck, 1,500 Grey Teal, but only 500 and 200 Hardheads and Pacific Black Duck respectively. All these were on the lake. On the swamp areas about 5,000 Magpie Geese, 2,000 Glossy Ibis and a thousand Australian Pelicans. To then begin to speak of 500 Straw-necked Ibis, 250 Pacific Herons, 300 each of Great and Intermediate Egrets and 250 Black-tailed Native Hens seems trivial, although about 500 Willie Wagtails and the same number of Magpie Larks is something we seldom see.

There were many others: 160 Royal Spoonbills for example, and 350 Brolgas, but the exciting highlights for us were two Black Falcons, 1 White-bellied Sea Eagle 95kms from the sea, and to our disbelief 15 Great Crested Grebes in an area where we understood they did not exist. Strangely we did not see either of the other two Grebes, although they are not uncommon in the Kimberley -oh yes, and another Yellow Chat. Going back to Erskine Bore across country we were enchanted to flush Golden-headed Cisticolas in the waving seas of grass and also 2 Button-quail, probably Little, but we aren't certain about that.

As southerners who choose to live in the Kimberley we were enchanted to spend several hours in the midst of such beauty - we wish that others (without guns) could share with us sights and sounds like these.

As a postscript could we suggest that this seems an ideal place to add to the Wildlife Heritage list or its equivalent.

Brice Wells.



Black-tailed Godwit at Point Waylen. Also in hundreds near Wyndham, May 1986.

Photograph by Peel Howden.

HOW THEY WADDLED

Results of the 1986 Great Duck Count

More than 100 volunteer observers recently participated in a census of waterfowl in south-western Australia. The census, known as *The Great Duck Count*, was organised by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union with funding from the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Ducks, swans and coots were counted at 850 wetlands from Kalbarri to Esperance, in the first of a series of annual surveys to determine long-term changes in the abundance of each species. This initiative has yet to be emulated by other States.

The Great Duck Count was conducted from 8-16 March and preliminary analysis of results has revealed totals of 84,000 ducks and 18,000 swans. These figures have doubled the highest figures recorded in R.A.O.U. surveys of 200 nature reserves in south-western Australia since 1981. A sample of all major wetland types was investigated in the Great Duck Count; this included 19 estuaries not in reserves and 490 farm dams. A small number of remote sites (e.g. Kimberley) was surveyed to give an indication of conditions elsewhere in the State.

Australian Shelducks, Pacific Black Ducks and Grey Teal comprised more than 80% of the ducks counted in south-western Australia. Counts of the Black Swan, Musk Duck and Maned Duck were several times higher than previous counts, but Hardheads were largely absent from the region. As shown by earlier R.A.O.U. studies, populations of the Freckled Duck and Chestnut Teal were particularly low (a few hundred each), highlighting the need for urgent studies of requirements for conservation of these two species.

The Black Swan was the dominant species on estuaries and inlets, while Maned Ducks were dominant on farm dams. Counts from the Swan River provided many of the 16,000 Eurasian Coots tallied.

Dumpleyung Lake and Peel Inlet both held in excess of 5000 swans and ducks, while 20 other wetlands each carried at least 1000 swans and ducks. Many of these sites were in the Coblinine River system, in the Shires of Woodanilling and Wagin. Some wetlands such as Mortijinup Lake near Esperance were not previously known to be important for waterfowl. Of the 57 metropolitan wetlands surveyed, Bibra and Yangebup Lakes held the greatest numbers of swans and ducks.

A comprehensive report will be published later in the year. The organisers wish to thank all who participated, as their efforts have given this important study a successful start. Undoubtedly the birds are thankful too!

COMING MEETINGS

Monday 16 June Roger Jaensch : important discoveries from water bird studies in W.A. since 1981.

28 July Ron Van Delft : metro birds

25 August Dr Harry Recher : either on honeyeater ecology in Eastern Australia or on heron ecology in North America (Dr Recher is with the Australian Museum, Sydney)

22 September John deJose : Director of the Zoological Gardens Perth : The New Zoo, new Initiatives

COMING EXCURSIONS

Saturday 12 July - North Gingin

We intend to visit an area of vacant Crown land just north of Gingin. Some 8000 hectares, it was proposed as a nature reserve (Boonanarring) under the System Six recommendations. Mainly jarrah woodland with patches of banksia, little is known of the birdlife to be found there. Come and help improve knowledge of the area. Easy to moderate walks expected. Meet at the main picnic park area in Gingin at 0830 a.m. Leader - Allan Burbidge.

Saturday 26 July - Star Swamp

World Environment Day Walk No. 1

As well as the swamp there is surrounding bushland with tuart, banksias, blackboys and heath. Meet at the swamp in Hope Street North Beach/Waterman near Lawley Street at 2 p.m. The leader will be metro-birder Mrs Vera Patterson who knows the area well.

Saturday 9 August - Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve

Located near Brookton this reserve contains impressive stands of powderbark wandoo. Black Honeyeater (exceptional), Tawny Frogmouth, Painted Button-quail and Elegant Parrots were amongst those sighted on the trip in March. Moderate to easy walks with some more strenuous around the rock. Meet just past the intersection of Brookton Hwy and Canning Road, Karragullen at 0730 (same place as in March). Round trip of about 250 km.

15-18 August; Lewana Cottage Campout

Two cottages have been reserved at the Lewana settlement 17km from Balingup on the Blackwood River. (One cottage suits persons of restricted mobility). Join us for low-key bush birding and some free time in a pleasant setting for 3 nights. Cost is \$15 accommodation. Bring your own food. No tents or vans.

To reserve a place ring Diane 381 9035 (5-8pm weekdays) and pay \$15 by 30 July to D. Beckingham, 101 Park St., Subiaco 6008. Organiser - D. Beckingham.

Sunday 31 August - Carine Swamp (Metro walk)

World Environment Day Walk No. 2

Meet at 2 p.m. in the carpark off Beach Road (between Duffy Road and Okely Road Carine) at the reserve. Leader - Geoff Shannon.

Saturday 13 September - Neerabup/Jandabup

Neerabup National Park and Lake Jandabup are near Wanneroo. Neerabup has some prime tuart forest. We visited this area in February 1986 and it will be interesting to compare sightings from each outing. Meet at the corner of Church Street and Scenic Drive, Wanneroo at 0830 a.m.

CAMPOUT : Saturday 27 - Monday 29 September - Tutanning Nature Reserve

Located some 20 km East of Pingelly this Reserve of 2089 hectares is on the old Dutarning Range. The vegetation is a mixture of wandoo, open woodland and casuarina thickets with breakaways and granite outcrops. Numbats are said to occur there. As a result of our last visit in June 1985, 14 species were added to the Reserve bird list which now totals 85. We have permission to camp on farming land near the CALM quarters. Toilet facilities will be available. An officer from CALM will accompany our party. Pingelly is 154 km from Perth - allow enough driving time for a rendezvous at Pingelly Post Office at 0915 a.m.

MEETING REPORTS

INFORMAL MEETING - 24 FEBRUARY

A goodly number of members attended the Herdsman Wildlife Centre on a warm evening where they were entertained by a series of slides taken by Murray Unkovich. Murray has travelled frequently in the north of the State and his commentary was informative. Although 'professional' status as a photographer was disclaimed, the slides were good and of real interest. Those who have ventured into the hard world of bird photography will fully appreciate the skills displayed.

GUEST SPEAKER - 24 MARCH

Brian Collins spoke about some aspects of the research he has carried out with Sunbirds and Sugarbirds in the Cape Town area in South Africa. These birds are abundant in many parts of southern Africa, especially those regions where proteas, ericas and leucospermums flower profusely. Sugarbirds typically weigh 35-45 gm and are conspicuous by virtue of their aerobatic displays and tendency to perch on top of the vegetation that they visit. Sunbirds are generally much smaller, ranging from collared and orange-breasted sunbirds that weigh 7-10 gm to malachite sunbirds that weigh approximately 15 gm. These birds are also conspicuous, mainly because of their brightly-coloured plumage and quick, darting movements. Sugarbirds and sunbirds make some use of insects, but generally rely on nectar as their main source of food. When visiting flowers to obtain nectar, they acquire substantial loads of pollen that are subsequently brushed onto the stigmas of other flowers. In many cases, the timing of visits by birds is closely synchronized with development of the flowers. For instance, visits are most frequent to flowers when nectar availability is greatest and either pollen is available on anthers or pollen presenters, or stigmas are receptive to pollen that is deposited on them. Flowers that produce little nectar are rarely visited by sunbirds or sugarbirds.

INFORMAL MEETING 26 MAY

John Hansen gave an interesting account of the complexities of sound recording of birds. Like bird photographs which appear at first consideration to be a matter of simplicity, so sound recording turns out not to be just a matter of setting up a microphone and recording device. The microphone, unlike human ears, is not able to filter out unwanted sound, with the result that if there are not extraneous noises (wind, vehicles, etc.) a whole aviary appears to go off at once. John capably pointed out some tricks of the trade to overcome these difficulties, though recording in the night seemed to pose a few problems of identification. John also showed some excellent slides of the sequence of the Twelve-Wire Bird-of-Paradise courting display and calls to match. A most enjoyable evening.

EXCURSION REPORTS

LAKE GWELUP - 23 FEBRUARY

Some sixty people attended on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Bird numbers were less than earlier in the year because of repeated disturbances by boats and because of recent rain. Consequently the total numbers of ducks were reduced and only Black Duck and domestic species were present. A Black-shouldered Kite hovered and swooped and an Australian Hobby dashed past. The highlight of the day was a party of Rainbow Bee-eaters hawking through the trees which also contained White-winged Trillers and Varied Sittella. Old nests of Rainbow Bee-eater, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Singing Honeyeater and Black-shouldered Kite were pointed out. We were pleased to have the company of a number of 'local people' and thanks to those members who made them welcome. Geoff Shannon

BOYAGIN ROCK - 8 MARCH

A pleasant walk around the Rock in the morning, followed by an excursion into heath and wandoo woodland in the afternoon resulted in a list of 55 species for the day. A lack of flowers in the heath meant that honeyeaters were few in number, but a total of twelve species were seen. Two Tawny Frogmouths between the carpark and the Rock attracted the attention of the photographers. Common Bronzewing nesting and Dusky Woodswallows feeding dependent young were found. Almost everyone got excellent views of an obliging Painted Button-quail but the highlight of the trip, however, was a pair of Black Honeyeaters. These were first sighted by Simon Nevill in wandoo woodland in the south-eastern section of the Reserve. They were very quiet and for much of the time were fairly low down so that everyone got a good view. Black Honeyeaters are birds of the inland, not often observed in the more coastal areas. Those people who stayed overnight to see the comet were disappointed because of the dense cloud cover, but it was otherwise a very successful trip. An enjoyable day's birding which resulted in a useful contribution to our knowledge of the birds of this important Nature Reserve.

BOLD PARK - 16 MARCH

At this twilight meeting, led by Ron Van Delft, the bird people became mixed up with the flower people. It had nothing to do with the birds and the bees, it so happened that the meeting coincided with the only Sunday in Garden Week. The venue for the excursion was advertised as being Bold Park, but it was conducted around what in wetter times are called Perry Lakes, which were only a series of ponds and puddles - Perry Ponds? Scurrilous rumour had it that the water shortage was caused by the flower people watering their plants - even if true, they would have had difficulty. Water was scarce, so much so that two Galahs which walked down to the water's edge to drink were chased away by a Pacific Black Duck - in order to conserve what was left of the precious fluid. About 20 species were recorded. The number of spectators varied at each stopping place as people joined and left the group as they felt like it. After a B.B.Q. tea, ten intrepid birdos faced the dangers of the night to seek nocturnal birds but only managed to raise a single Red Wattlebird from its slumber. J. Donahoe

CLAUGHTON RESERVE - 12 APRIL

A small group of nine gathered at Cloughton Reserve on a still windless morning. Thirty species were observed including Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Mistletoe Bird and both Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel. A Darter was seen to descend almost vertically some 12 metres into the Swan River and emerge with a fish in its bill. Alan Robertson

THOMSONS LAKE - 10 MAY

About 30 people attended the RAOU excursion at Thompsons Lake on May 10th. Small groups of observers made their way across part of the dry lake bed where 7 Purple Swamphens, an Australian Kestrel and a Black-shouldered Kite were sighted. The return trip was through open bushland where 19 different species of birds were seen, including Scarlet Robin, Rufous Whistler, Red-capped Parrot and a Little Wattlebird. The total number of species observed was 23.

COMMITTEE NOTES

The Committee met in February and March. Among matters that came under consideration have been :-

Conservation Sub-Committee - This group is attempting to produce a list of important WA birding localities.

Bird Week (October 1986) - Activities for the Bird Week are under discussion and planning.

Finance - Ever necessary topic for thought and management.

Future Projects - Discussion of ideas for future WA Group bird projects.

Associated Groups - Desire to achieve closer liaison with the various groups associated with birding e.g. Raptor Association, Seabird Group etc.

As well as matters concerned with the week-to-week running of the WA Group.

PERUP BANDING WORKSHOP

4-7 April

The Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme held a Workshop at Perup Forest Study Centre over an extended weekend from 4-7 April, 1986.

Forty eight people attended, with twenty-three banders taking part in the Workshop - the first of its kind in W.A.

The objectives of the Workshop were to :-

1. promote discussion on handling and banding techniques
2. standardise data gathering procedures
3. initiate communication between banders
4. encourage contributions to a guide for ageing and sexing Australian birds in the hand.

Daily activities centred on trapping and banding a variety of bird species with nightly sessions of bat banding

Afternoon and evening seminars were led by Dr Harry Recher, Australian Museum, Sydney; Dr Ron Wooller, Murdoch University, Perth; and Dr Brian Collins, WAIT, Perth. Each described a research programme based on mist netting and banding resident and transient birds. Group discussions followed and took place whenever two or more people found the opportunity to share a common interest. One participant, however, was seen deep in conversation with himself. Pleasant, selective company, no doubt! Brett Lane, Co-ordinator, RAOU Wader Studies, gave an impromptu lecture on moult recording techniques, describing the process of data recording used by Ken Rogers, Regional Organiser in Victoria, when compiling information for ageing and sexing birds in the hand. A guide, called "The Banders Aid" will serve as a national reference for banders in Australia and will establish the procedures to be followed when accumulating data. Knowledge of moult patterns and ageing processes in Australian Birds is not well documented: "The Banders Aid" will serve to remedy this condition.

122 birds of 21 species were processed; 97 new birds and 25 recoveries.

Following is a list of the most frequently encountered species :-

	BANDED	RECOVERED
Splendid Fairy-wren	16	4
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	8	6
Grey Fantail	10	2
White-browed Scrubwren	9	3
Golden Whistler	7	2
Inland Thornbill	7	2

Although the total number of birds handled was not very spectacular, the true value of the experience was in just how much could be learned about each individual. Every aspect of banding technique and species morphology came under discussion, often long after the bird had been released.

Group activities included an exercise in comparative measuring during which 16 people took a series of measurements from

three dead (preserved) birds. The table below shows the recorded measurements made by the two organisers and the mean of the collective measurements.

Black-faced				
Woodswallow	: Wing length	: 126	: 125	: 124.9
Peregrine Falcon	: Head-Bill	: 73.6	: 73.3	: 71.63
	: Exposed Culmen	: 26.4	: 26.4	: 26.14
	: Middle Claw	: 21.5	: 21.5	: 21.89
Singing				
Honeyeater	: Bill Length	: 20.6	: 20.4	: 20.67

Variations were very small, even from those who had not had a lot of previous practise at measuring. It is encouraging to know that with regular reinforcement, group contributions of data can be incorporated into a banding research programme.

A register of approved banding projects is being compiled to publicise the activities of W.A. banders. This information will be featured in the "Corella Newsletter". Eight projects were registered at the Workshop.

Special guests for a day were Dick and Molly Brown of Manjimup and Ian and Eleanor Rowley of Guildford. Their brief presence enabled many banders to meet for the first time the curators of banding programmes that may well be the longest running in W.A.; the Brown's at Middlesex and the Rowley's at Gooseberry Hill.

The next Workshop is already in preparation. This will be held somewhere in the Kalgoorlie district and will take place during the weekend of 20-22 September 1986. Anyone interested should contact Wally Klau, Sub-Regional Organiser, Goldfields W.A., P.O. Box 346, Kalgoorlie, W.A. 6430 or Perry de Rebeira, Regional Organiser, 12 Glenwood Avenue, Glen Forrest W.A. 6071.

Perry de Rebeira - (Regional Organiser, Western Australia)
Grant Wardell-Johnson - (Sub-Regional Organiser, South-Western Australia)

METRO BIRDER NEWS

"A Guide to Finding Birds in Perth" will be the official title of the forthcoming book.

During the last few months good progress has been made towards writing the book despite unexpected delays which put the timetable out by at least two weeks.

It is proving a difficult task to choose 40 sites from the 118 Metro birder sites that have sufficient surveys. A number of criteria have been used to objectively choose the sites. First, sites which do not have public access, such as golf courses, were crossed out.

Then a table was drawn up with sites across the top, and species down the side. For each species and site the percentage of surveys recording that species was calculated. For example if 3 of 10 surveys recorded Yellow-rumped Thornbill, a 30% value is recorded. For each species the two highest percentages were highlighted where there were not more than two sites recording 100% (as was the case with many common species). As the purpose of this exercise was to find the sites with the highest chance of finding species X in a short survey, only those surveys which included a start and finish time were included in this analysis. After adding the common species this table produced 48 sites, but with an uneven spread of species per site.

Geographical location, land tenure, breeding information and species richness will be used as criteria to reduce the number of sites further to the desired number.

It was quite surprising to find a number of species restricted to one, two or three sites only. A list of these species and their sites will be published in the book.

I will be in contact with Metrobirders who have surveyed sites that are likely to be included in the book, seeking more specific information about the site and the survey routes used.

I would like to thank the office volunteers who helped check and put the data into order. That mammoth task is now complete. Typing is now the only MBP task for which volunteers are required.

Apologies to those people expecting printouts of their survey work. At the moment the printouts are available on request show-

ing total species frequency at each site over the whole year. Priority at the moment is getting the book to the publisher and some data analysis and much of the first draft is still to be done. When this is completed I expect to have some time to complete the task of printing and distributing over 180 individual printouts.

RON VAN DELFT

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

EYRE COURSE PROGRAMMES

All courses run from Sunday afternoon to the following Saturday morning. Cost of courses is \$150 which includes food, accommodation and transport between Cocklebidy and Eyre. Families are most welcome.

EYRE'S FURRY FRIENDS : 22-28 June 1986

Leader: Doug Watkins

Need to broaden your horizons? Come to Eyre for the week and have personal introductions to the mammals of the southern Nullarbor and Roe Plains. Activities will include looking for cave bats and 'drift lining' for Pygmy Possums and hopping mice. Why stay at home?

HISTORY OF EYRE TELEGRAPH STATION : 27 July - 2 August 1986

Leader: Bill Graham

The history of the East-West telegraph line, Eyre, the Eyre Telegraph Station, Observatory and the region with site inspections.

ART WORKSHOP : 21-27 September 1986

Leader: Donna Reid

Drawing and painting the unique scenery, flora and fauna of Eyre, concentrating on acrylic painting, ink and pastel.

BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS : 28 September - 4 October 1986

Leaders: Rob and Jan Hill

This course is designed to give beginners a knowledge of how to set about identifying birds. The use of binoculars, note-taking in the field and the proper use of reference guides and books will be covered. Birds nesting in spring will make this an ideal time to visit Eyre.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY : 7-13 December 1986

Leader: Dr. Stephen Davies

This course, led by the Director of the R.A.O.U., will cover a variety of aspects of field ornithology including banding, census and bird behaviour.

XMAS AT EYRE : 21-27 December 1986

Rush to escape the rush - join the Eyre Escape.

A delightful place to spend Christmas. There will be abundant birdlife, pleasant weather and a magnificent Xmas feast. Enjoy Christmas at Eyre with the help of an enthusiastic group of young naturalists.

NEW YEAR AT EYRE : 28 December - 3 January 1987

Your New Year Resolutions must be:

1. Come to Eyre.
2. Birdwatch.
3. Learn some local history.
4. Visit the local sites.
5. Swim.
6. Beachcomb.
7. Stargaze.
8. Eat good home cooked food.
9. Relax.
10. Enjoy a week at Eyre.

Leaders: Mike and Mandy Bamford

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR DISCOUNT: 10% discount for deposits received by the end of September.

LIMITED PLACES. BOOK EARLY TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT

DUNE STABILIZATION WORK PARTY 5-24 January 1987
Cost: 1/2 price

Why not go on a working holiday? Get fit, healthy and tanned. All you need to do is enjoy 1/2 of each day planting seeds, breathing the fresh sea air and appreciating the panorama from Irene's Peak. A bargain difficult to resist. This is a most important project currently relying on several dedicated people who desperately need helpers. Eyre's future may depend on your assistance.

In 1987 courses will cost \$160 or \$150 for those who pay one month in advance. Cost includes accomodation, food, tuition and transport within the reserve.

Format: Courses commence with lunch on Sunday and finish with lunch on Saturday.

BIRDING BRUSH-UP : 25-31 January

Leader: Steve Keeling

Following the highly informative and entertaining Easter course led by Steve in 1986 we have invited him to return to Eyre. Steve, a professional ornithological consultant, has run bird tours in Turkey, Cyprus and Australia. His extensive birding experience on six continents and his enormous enthusiasm for teaching will ensure a most rewarding week. Come along and extend your birding knowledge and have loads of fun. Beginners welcome.

BIRDS BY DAY, BATS BY NIGHT AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE DARK 15-21 March

Leader: Doug Watkins

Intensive birding in the day and bat banding at night. You will at last have the chance to view, at close quarters, those squeaking creatures which whiz past in the dark. This course offers a wide variety of exciting experiences including some caving while searching for bats. Doug, a past warden at Eyre, and a professional ornithological consultant has an excellent knowledge of the area so that you will have a stimulating and most enjoyable and entertainig holiday.

OTHER COURSES BEING ORGANIZED FOR 1987 :

Photography

Entomology

Botany

History

Caving

THE NERD - A SUCCESSFUL NIGHT AT THE THEATRE

A group of 90 members and friends came along to the opening night of "The Nerd" at the Regal in April. It was good to see such a large group come along and enjoy themselves.

The Nerd was played by Chris Langham, and he had everyone in fits of laughter. The play was funny right to the end, when it was revealed that the Nerd was all a set-up!

The evening raised \$410 towards a replacement vehicle for Eyre. Our thanks go out to John Thornton (Joint Managing Director) for arranging for us to go, and to Claire Condry (Promoter) for her help and advice. Perhaps we will have another evening at the Regal later in the year.

REPORT OF THE "BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS" COURSE

Leader - Steve Keeling

Our decision to spend a few days at Eyre fortuitously coincided with the "Birding for Beginners" course. So we joined the R.A.O.U. and set off.

On our arrival at Cocklebidy we were met with friendship and a delightful level of organisation. By the afternoon we were on the beach for an exhilarating drive, complete with notebooks, binoculars and information about how to record our sightings. Terms like "jizz" and "twitcher" had entered our vocabulary and we were the proud owners of an Eyre Report and a Pizzey.

The small number off people enrolled meant that we each had special attention, but was disappointing given the high quality and enjoyment of the course. But new people arrived daily from London, Melbourne, Caiguna, a grazier and his family from one

of the Nullarbor stations and the crew of a fishing boat (one member literally walked out of the sea, his dinghy having capsized in the evening surf). Still, the only topic of conversation was birds!

Life was full of supprises as we now walked in the bush and on the beach with eyes and ears alert. The sighting of a Mallee Fowl led to the successful search for its mound. That day we had additional exciting bonuses; a Tawny Frogmouth roosting in the burnished trunk of a Mallee and a Dugite, which looked beautiful in its natural habitat.

The Eyre Throistle-toed Easter Rabbit, which had lured us eastwards, eluded our gaze, but we did sample its eggs, accompanied by drinks on the verandah, whilst watching the setting sun and the evening aerobatics of Welcome Swallows. This evening ritual was always followed by a delicious meal prepared by Jan Hill.

The serious matters of birding were then tackled and the day's sightings discussed and recorded. This was followed each night by a "lecture" from Steve, on what was to us, a new aspect of birding. Our knowledge of birds made exponential leaps during the week, and in keeping with the high tone of the course, each student presented a "paper" on a bird observation and on the final night sat an examination. The exam proved to be so hilarious that it was hard for the half drowned fisherman to make has ar-rival known!

On our last day we sketched birds and then recorded them descriptively. With the help of Steve's sharp eyes, we saw what appeared to be a Sooty Shearwater resting out on the waves. Then another exciting find, a beach washed Southern Giant Petrel. Despite its offensive odour it was taken back to the house and measured, identified and photographed from every angle.

The course was memorable for Steve's knowledge and humour, the company of Bill Graham whose links with the first occupants of the station gave another dimension to our visit, the hospitality and organisation of Jan and Rob Hill and the beauty of the birds, the mallee, dunes, beach and the sunsets reflected in the water and wet sand.

Ralph and Pete Lake

W.A. GROUP EXCURSION TO EYRE - May 4 to 10

Seven members enjoyed the comforts and hospitality of Jan and Rob at Eyre Bird Observatory during what proved to be a happy, if at times exhausting week's birding. Throughout the week the weather was pleasantly mild - ideal birding weather (rain on only one evening). Rob had drawn up a program of entertainment consisting of early morning bush walks around the Observatory and trips throughout the Reserve to view the different habitats and birdlife. By the end of the five days we had seen 69 species, including Red-capped Robins which are a migrant at Eyre and a Redthroat, only observed once before, in 1978.

The first day we were driven along the beach to 9-mile Hut to help in the weekly wader count. 14 species of birds were seen including 2 Double-banded Plovers and a number of Australasian Gannets fishing out to sea.

On Tuesday Rob drove us to Burnabbie, a station deserted early this century, then on across Damper Flats to Burnabbie Rock Hole. After fossicking in the ruins we climbed the escarpment and saw amongst other birds, Yellow-rumped Pardalotes. We lunched in the sunlight under a eucalypt dripping with nectar from the flowering mistletoe, while Mistletoebirds and an assortment of honeyeaters fed above us. After dinner Rob took us spotlighting on the back of a bucking Landrover.

The next day we went on a long drive to Twilight Cove. Highlights of the drive were a pair of Hoary-headed Grebes, a drake Musk Duck swimming near the beach and the 3 Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring overhead as we ate lunch. To walk off lunch some people clambered up the escarpment, which is 120 m high, under the careful watch of the Wedge-tailed Eagles!

Thursday was by way of a "rest day" both for us and our intrepid driver. We took it easy by doing the weekly bush bird count along the East Track, seeing a Southern Scrub-robin and flights of dashing Purple-crowned Lorikeets.

Friday, sadly our last day, Jan drove us up the awesome escarpment to Cocklebidy via Haig Track. Whilst in the bush above the escarpment we had the pleasure of seeing Red-capped Robins

as well as various honeyeaters, thornbills, Weebills and a "jollification" of Jacky Winters. A sad note was to find, well within the boundary of the Reserve, a dead Little Eagle beside a bait set to poison wild dogs.

The very enjoyable week was made more so by the superb evening meals prepared by Jan and Rob, and by their combined helpfulness and enthusiasm as hosts at Eyre. Jan's ploy of awarding a Mars bar to everyone for outstanding achievement, be it spotting an unusual bird or racing up a rocky hill in record time, added to our enjoyment. And, of course, the wonderful sight of 30 or more Pink Cockatoos planeing in for their morning and evening drink will long remain in our memories. A week to be remembered and thought of during the forthcoming dull days of winter.

Margery Clegg and Brian Barrett



Buff-banded Rail at Alfred Cove: a regular feature.
Photograph by Peel Howden.

WADER STUDY GROUP

WADER BANDING - ALBANY (1985-1986)

After a late start, and with considerable help from Perth-based members of the Wader Study Group, a number of waders were banded. Mist-nets were used at Princess Royal Harbour and Oyster Harbour and in early April nine stints were caught with the cannon net. Species and totals banded :-

Red-necked Stint	71
Red Knot	9
Greenshank	3
Red-capped Plover	1
Large Sandplover	1
Bar-tailed Godwit	1
Curlew Sandpiper	1

Three Red-necked Stints were re-trapped having been banded by Ken Mills at the same site in 1982 (1) and 1984 (2). Vic Smith.

April 1986 North-West Expedition

R.A.O.U. - World Wildlife Fund - Earthwatch

The April expedition to Broome was extremely successful. Although we were unable to band waders, our research programme, outlined in the second circular, achieved some interesting results.

For fourteen days, the team of four (2 Earthwatchers, one New Zealand wader enthusiast and the organiser) spent each day counting waders to determine the proportion of adult birds in flocks. Each evening was spent watching for departing migratory waders and using the radar at the Broome Meteorological Station to monitor migratory departure.

Heavy migration (north-westerly departure) was observed on only four evenings, corresponding with strong south-easterly

winds. These winds were associated with a strong high pressure system over the Great Australian Bight which caused what meteorologists call a south-easterly "surge" effect. Not only does this give the waders clear weather and tail winds in Broome, but it is strong enough to push the equatorial trough well north of the equator. This pushes unsettled weather and tropical storms further north than usual, giving the waders clear conditions and favourable winds all the way to Indonesia and South-east Asia.

Participants were treated to some spectacular sights as flocks of waders flew out to sea on the start of a 2,000 to 3,000 kilometre, 24 to 36 hour flight. Most adult birds were in full breeding plumage and were so heavily laden with fat for the flight north that they usually sat down when roosting on the beaches! From front on they looked like little red, black and white pears.

WATERBIRD USAGE STUDIES

A RECONNAISSANCE OF NORTH-EASTERN WETLANDS in W.A.

During the first two weeks of May 1986, I visited remote wetlands in the north-east of Western Australia to assist planning coordinated team surveys at those wetlands later in the year (see below). In ten days I visited the lower Ord River wetlands, Lake Argyle and Lake Gregory, savouring the warmth, relaxed lifestyle and absorbing landscape! I was given a great deal of assistance by Mike and Heather Howell at Kununurra, Chris Done (C.A.L.M. Regional Manager) and Mike Osborn (Wildlife Officer, Wyndham). I am also grateful to the Mulan and Billiluna aboriginal communities for allowing me access to Lake Gregory (near Balgo Mission) and to John Mason and Richard and Muriel Bardon for advice when I arrived in the area.

The LOWER ORD (Marlgu) WETLANDS are largely contained within the Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve and are easily reached from the highway south-east of Wyndham. In the wet season, all or part of the floodplain may be inundated with fresh water, providing breeding habitat for herons, egrets, Magpie Geese and ducks. In the dry period (April to October), the wetland is reduced to deep billabongs and shrinking claypans which can be approached by vehicle where tracks exist. In May 1986, the claypans were teeming with birds, though they could only have persisted for another month. Lingering waders were feeding frantically to prepare for their journey northward, despite frequent disturbance from two pairs of Black Falcons, Marsh Harriers and a goshawk. Noisy throngs of waterfowl loafed amongst flowering lillies and rushes in the deeper waters. Surveys in this area yielded the following results:

- * 26,700 waterbirds (54 species), including 18,400 ducks and geese (10 species).
- * 6500 Hardheads and 6000 Grey Teal.
- * 1500 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers & 350 Black-tailed Godwits.
- * 2 Painted Snipe (rare in W.A.) and a Pectoral Sandpiper.

- also 22 Yellow Chats in tall, flooded herbage and more than 300 Flock Bronzewings.

Little time was spent at LAKE ARGYLE but 12 kilometres of shore in the NE and E of the lake were surveyed. Water-levels were already low, with submerged weed prolific in sheltered bays and inlets. Against the rugged backdrop of the Carr Boyd Ranges, the following results were obtained:

- * 11,300 waterbirds (41 species), including 10,200 ducks and geese (10 species).
- * 6500 Hardheads, in dense packs lurking in the weed-beds.
- * 10 Freckled Duck (rarely seen in the north) and 85 Comb-crested Jacanas.

- parties totalling 50 Flock Bronzewings, coming to drink.

LAKE GREGORY rarely dries out but is usually saline, with little flooded vegetation. A massive flood in Sturt Creek in January 1983 caused the lake to become a fresh wetland roughly 50 kilometres in length. Though much reduced in area by May 1986, Lake Gregory was still fresh and deep, with extensive areas of flooded trees that had been killed by the big flood. High water

marks on these trees indicated that the lake had been three metres higher! Sampling at 10 or more sites around the lake (covering 10-15% of lakeshore), I counted:

- * 32,100 waterbirds (49 species), including 9100 ducks and swans (10 species). Total figures probably exceeded 100,000 waterbirds and 25,000 ducks and swans.
 - * 13,000 Eurasian Coots (probably 40,000 +).
 - * 7000 Little Black Cormorants; more than 5000 nests were in use around the lake, thousands more were no longer in use.
 - * 124 Freckled Ducks and 158 Great Crested Grebes (probably 400-500 of each); both were previously unknown in the NE Interior of W.A.
- another pair of Black Falcons.

These results confirmed the international importance of each area, while the need for comprehensive coverage was made more apparent. Boats and light aircraft will be required at Lake Argyle and Lake Gregory, due to obstructed vision from shore and large distances to be covered. Both lakes are less than one hour from supplies of food, water and fuel and an airstrip.

REMOTE WETLAND EXPEDITION - AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1986

Approximate dates for the expedition have now been set. We expect to spend a week at Lake Argyle and a week at Lake Gregory sometime in the last two weeks in August and the first week in September 1986. Participants will be advised of precise dates as soon as possible. This period has been chosen such that it avoids the hottest part of the year and yet falls as late as possible in the dry season, to capitalise on the retreat of waterbirds to the few permanent wetlands in the region. Note that the dates are earlier than was previously advertised.

Our objective at Lake Argyle will be to obtain comprehensive counts of all waterbirds, a feat that has not been achieved before. As shown by the earlier article, the numbers of waterbirds could be colossal and we will need to use 4WD vehicles, small boats and light aircraft to cover this, Australia's largest artificial lake. Few ornithologists have visited Lake Gregory, especially since the big flood of 1983. Our aim at this lake will be to make the first complete survey of the lake; this could provide data to reinforce the status of Lake Gregory as a Wetland of International Importance.

The small group of committed participants is sufficient to do the job, but further helpers are still welcome. A host of skills can be applied to this type of expedition: experienced counters, drivers, bush mechanics and camp organisers are required. This could be a valuable learning experience for newcomers to waterbird surveys. Intending participants should note that they should:

- * make their own way to (and back from) Kununurra (for L Argyle) or Halls Creek (for L Gregory);
- * bear with cramped transportation if not bringing their own vehicle;
- * appreciate that the weather will be hot, dust will be thick and mosquitoes sometimes persistent!
- * contribute to the daily cost of communal eating, unless coming fully self-sufficient;
- * be prepared to follow any reasonable request from the organisers.

We hope that all who participate will have a rollicking good time and enjoy fabulous birding. If interested, PLEASE CONTACT ROGER JAENSCH at the R.A.O.U. OFFICE BEFORE 30 JUNE.

REGULAR SURVEYS CLOSER TO HOME

Apologies to those who indicated that they would be willing to regularly visit wetlands in their neighbourhood or district, but who haven't heard from me yet. The business of saving wetlands and waterbirds is demanding on time and energy! Please be patient.

About twenty observers from Broome to Esperance are currently making two-monthly surveys of waterbirds and we are grateful for their contributions. Although a number of important sites are covered, some still lack coverage, for example:

WETLAND	SHIRE	FREQUENCY OF SURVEYS
Jandabup Lake	Wanneroo	every 2 months
Lake Monger	Perth	monthly
Canning River	Canning	quarterly
Alcoa Claypits	Rockingham	monthly
Goegrup Lakes	Murray	quarterly
Leschenault Inlet	Harvey	quarterly
Namming Lakes	Dandaragan	every 2 months
Guraga Lake	Dandaragan	quarterly
the Moora Lakes	Moora	quarterly
Toolibin Lake	Wickepin	every 2 months
Yealering Lake	Yealering	quarterly
Jilakin	Lake Kulin	occasionally
North Lake Grace	Lake Grace	occasionally
Yarnup Lagoon	Cranbrook	quarterly
Poorarrecup Lake	Cranbrook	occasionally
Yellilup Swamp	Jerramungup	occasionally
Jerdacuttup Lake	Ravensthorpe	occasionally

If you would like to be involved in this vital study, please CONTACT ROGER JAENSCH at the R.A.O.U. OFFICE. Some lakes are easier to get to and easier to survey than others, so all levels of experience can be employed! Information gathered by the R.A.O.U. is used in making important planning and management decisions for the wetlands and waterbirds of our State.

Roger Jaensch

OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in R.A.O.U. Reports or in technical journals. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. The *Atlas of Australian Birds*, Serventy & Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) of the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the autumn of 1986. Shire names are given in brackets. Observations that appear in other articles in this newsletter are not repeated here.

Please send details of sightings to 'The Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the R.A.O.U.

DOWN SOUTH

Red-tailed Tropicbird	— 1 dead, 12/1, Cockburn Cement Works.
Eastern Reef Egret	— 1, 30/3, 1 km W Point Ann, Fitzgerald River Nat. Park.
Black Bittern	— 1, 8/3, Nanga (Murray).
Glossy Ibis	— 14, 18/1, Chandala Lake (Chittering).
Royal Spoonbill	— 1, autumn 86, Big Carine Swamp (Metro).
Wandering Whistling Duck	— 2, 3/2, Bibra Lake (Metro): escapees?
Freckled Duck	— 49, 8/3, Lennard's Lake (Gingin). — 51, 12/3, Mortijinup Lake (Esperance). — 11, 12/3, Wheatfield Lake (Esperance). — 27, 15/3, Dumbleyung Lake (Dumbleyung).
Musk Duck	— 2220, 9/3, Lake Clifton (Mandurah).
Square-tailed Kite	— 1 on 28/1, 9/2 & 3/3, Kelmscott (Metro).
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	— 1, 12/3, Alfred Cove (Metro).

Little Eagle	— 1, 28/4, Slade St, Bayswater (Metro).
Buff-banded Rail	— 1, 10/2, Pipidinny Swamp (Wanneroo). — 1 roadkill, 12/3, Erindale Rd, Balcatta.
Australian Crake	— 4, 2/2, swamp 12 km S of Beverley.
Spotless Crake	— 14, 15/3, Grasmere Lake (Albany).
Black-tailed Native-hen	— 70, plus young, 25/2, Duranillin (West Arthur).
Sooty Oystercatcher	— 1, late February, Burns Beach (Metro).
Masked Lapwing	— 1, 13/3, Young River (Esperance).
Lesser Golden Plover	— 1, 14/3, Yellilup Swamp (Jerramungup). — 1, 23/3, Preston R mouth (Bunbury).
Hooded Plover	— 2, 29/3, Lake Clifton (Mandurah). — 65, 28/4, Kubitch Lake (Esperance).
Black-winged Stilt	— 3330, 12/1, Forrestdale Lake (Metro).
Eastern Curlew	— 3, 6/4, Preston R mouth (Bunbury).
Wood Sandpiper	— 16, 14/3, Yellilup Swamp (Jerramungup). — 1, 12/3, Coogee Lake (Metro).
Grey-tailed Tattler	— 1, 2/4, Alfred Cove (Metro).
Terek Sandpiper	— 12, 19/4, Coodanup (Murray).
Black-tailed Godwit	— 1, 13/3, dam near Stokes Inlet (Esperance).
Pectoral Sandpiper	— 4, 14/3, Yellilup Swamp (Jerramungup).
Long-toed Stint	— 7, 14/3, Yellilup Swamp (Jerramungup). — 2, 15/3, Dumbleyung Lake (Dumbleyung).
Great Skua	— 1, 23/2, Mandurah sea-wall.
White-winged Tern	— 2, 13/3, Lake Claremont (Metro).
Common Tern	— 10, 6/4, Mandurah sea-wall.
Regent Parrot	— 8, 4/2, Capel (Capel).
Cockatiel	— 1, 14/2, Wembley (Metro). — 3, 25/2, 5 km SSE Broomehill.
Budgerigar	— 1, 25/4, Roleystone (Metro). — 20, 5/1, 6 km SW Broomehill. — also seen at S Lake Grace this summer.
Pallid Cuckoo	— 19/4, Alfred Cove (Metro).
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	— 1, 31/3, Roleystone (Metro).
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo	— 1, 6/4, Perup, 50 km E Manjimup.
Barn Owl	— 1, 9/4, Lake Gwelup (Metro).
Southern Boobook	— 1, 9/4, Freshwater Parade (Claremont).
Fork-tailed Swift	— 11, 26/1, 3 km NE Albany. — 10+, 31/3, William Bay Nat. Park (Denmark).
Black-faced Cuckoo	— 25 in a flock, 27/3, Woodvale (Metro). -shrike
White-breasted Robin	— 1, 1/3, Bickley Brook (Metro).
Crested Shrike-tit	— 2, 29/3, William Bay Nat. Park (Denmark).
Southern Emu-wren	— 1, 13/4, Bickley Brook (Metro).
Western Bristlebird	— 2, 29/3, 10 km W Two Peoples' Bay (Albany).
Red-eared Firetail	— 2, 1/3, 1 km S Boulder Rock (Armada-le-Kelmscott).

UP NORTH

Black-necked Stork	— 1, 25/7, 25 km N Marble Bar on Coongan Crossing.
Black Swan	— 15, wet season, Moulamen Sw (E of Derby).
Australian Shelduck	— 1, 19/4, Moulamen Swamp (E of Derby).

Little Curlew	— 450, 4/4, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
Terek Sandpiper	— 2, summer 85-86, Derby jetty.
Gallinago snipe	— 2, 20/3, South Hedland Sewage Ponds. — 1, 21/3, 20 km S Lombadina (NE of Broome). — 1, 22/3, Goldsworthy Sewage Ponds. — 1, 17/4, Lake Eda (E of Broome). — 3, 19/4, Moulamen Swamp (E of Derby). — 3, 9/4, Beagle Bay (N of Broome).
Yellow Chat	
Gouldian Finch	

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

KING FISHER MYSTERY

My daughter Clare found a dead Sacred Kingfisher at about 8.30pm on 11 February 1986 outside the back door of our house at 29 Joyce Road, Lesmurdie. The night was dark with light rain and it appears that the bird must have flown into the window of the lighted kitchen and killed itself. Its left wing was badly broken and it no doubt had other injuries which were less obvious.

If the bird did kill itself in the manner suggested, it may have been migrating northwards for the autumn. Serventy and Whittell (Birds of Western Australia, 5th edition, 1976, at page 310) remark that the "majority of birds leave again in early March", so our bird may have made an early start, perhaps prompted by the spell of cool overcast weather. Some of the African kingfishers e.g. the Woodland Kingfisher (*Halcyon senegalensis*) and the Pygmy Kingfisher (*Ispidina picta*) migrate at night and often kill or injure themselves by flying into the walls or windows of buildings, as do Angola Pittas (*Pitta angolensis*) and some other species.

J.N. Talbot

IT NEVER RAINS.....

The unseasonal heavy rain experienced in Perth on Friday 21 February, associated with Cyclone Rhonda, had an unexpected sequel in our garden in Applecross.

Early on the 22nd, loud squawks from our tame caged Galah on the back verandah alerted us to an unusual visitor (once when he gave that alarm we came out to find an immature White Ibis stalking leisurely across the lawn). On a bare branch at the top of our huge willow tree a Square-tailed Kite was surveying the scene.

I was able to watch for four minutes, long enough to notice details such as tail shape, long wings at rest, small beak for a raptor and colouration, i.e. patches of gold amongst the dark brown wing feathers, pale head, golden brown front, etc. As I expected the arrival of my binoculars was the signal for take off and circling the house and garden, I could observe wing and tail movements. I saw the Kite twice more later in the day in neighbouring gardens.

Later I heard a most unusual call. Being familiar with the local, and occasionally other migrating honeyeaters' calls, I can only describe it as - a succession of neatly defined notes, louder than most honeyeaters' but softer than a wattlebirds'. Reading later that the Square-Tailed Kite eats nestlings of honeyeaters it occurred to me that such a call could encourage a hungry nestling to give away its presence by cheeping. This is only a surmise as I cannot be certain I heard a Square-Tailed Kite's call.

On Sunday 23rd February at 5 pm We watched about 200 Welcome Swallows circling in the evening sky. This is not unusual for February when Welcome Swallows are preparing to migrate. At about 7.30pm when it was getting dark an extraordinary sound brought us into the back garden. Against the navy blue of the sky the black silhouettes of several hundred woodswallows weaved in tight circles at great speed. The sound was the whirring of their wings, a sound we will never forget. As they were in constant motion counting was impossible but 200 would be a conservative figure.

Gradually they started to settle on two large trees, a variegated ficus and a tall Lemon-scented Gum. When it grew darker the ficus, with broad leaves, was too dense to see through but the Lemon-scented Gum, with long thin pendulous' leaves gave ex-

cellent viewing with the night sky behind it. Half an hour later we went quietly down the garden and a gentle twittering indicated the birds were settling down. An hour or so later still a full moon had risen and looking up into the tree the silhouettes of the sleeping woodswallows showed up in clusters on many tiny branches.

On the 24th at 5.30am some of the birds must have already flown as there were only a fraction of the number we had seen the night before. By 6.30am the tree was empty. Later in the morning I searched under the tree and found many of the tiny green nuts from the Lemon-scented Gum. They had presumably been nibbled off.

I also found 10 little feathers scattered about, evidence of preening. Five of these were identical, each with the lower one third being very fluffy. The remaining two thirds of the feather was pale grey on underneath with the upper surface blue grey on one side and a slightly darker grey on the other, proving the feathers came from Masked Woodswallows. I've kept them as a memento.

Today, the 26th, I found a Southern Boobook perched in the upper branches of our back Jacaranda tree.

IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS

Katharine Highman

TREE PLANTING AT LAKE TOOLIBIN

Lake Toolibin, 20km south east of Wickepin forms part of a large catchment area called the Narrogin Wetland Complex.

In May and June 1985 Lake Toolibin was the site of a massive tree planting project undertaken as a joint venture between the Agriculture Department and Greening Australia [W.A.]

Concern for the area goes back to 1977 when Tim Negus, officer-in-charge of the Narrogin branch of the Agriculture Department began a series of studies into the environmental damage threatening the lake.

The main problem with the area, as with a lot of the wheatbelt, was the threat of salinisation. The clearing of timber causes;

- [a] the rise in the level of the salt water table making the land useless for cultivation

- [b] the increased salt water run-off from saline land into the catchment area.

In October 1984 the Department of Agriculture and Greening Australia [W.A.] decided that Lake Toolibin would provide a worthwhile project for the National Catchment Conservation Scheme. Through Greening Australia [W.A.] a number of organisations became involved. They are:

- * the Wickepin Soil Conservation District
- * the Wickepin Shire Council
- * Department of Conservation and Land Management

The preparation began soon after. A detailed study investigating the demands placed on the land was prepared. Each property was studied separately using surveys and aerial photographs.

In January 1985 seeds were collected from Lake Toolibin and nearby lake Dumbleyung and 5000 seedlings of Flat-topped Yate and Salt sheoak were ordered. These were planted 10 metres apart with sheoaks, wattles and tamarisks in between.

In February and March 1985 farmers were sent details of the planting programme. The programme was subsidised by the National Tree Programme which covered half the cost of the seedlings. The farmers only had to pay 20c per seedling. Information was also given regarding soil preparation, planting and aftercare. In April the specific sites were chosen and planting began in earnest in May. On June 18th 24,000 trees were planted with the aid of students of the two primary schools in Narrogin, Wickepin Primary, Narrogin High School and the Narrogin Agricultural College.

When the project is completed in 1987, 46,000 trees will have been planted.

From Greening Australia [W.A.] Inc.

JURIEN BAY AREA CAMP

Seven RAOU members spent the Easter break camped in wandoo woodland at Mount Benia serenaded by Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters all day long.

Thirty species were recorded and in sorties towards the coast, we saw two Bustards on the track to Sandy Point in coastal heath north of Jurien Bay. We also saw 13 Fork-tailed Swifts in the

vicinity of Drovers Cave National Park which is just north of the Jurien Road. Two Southern Boobook owls roosting in eucalypts in Cockleshell Gully were surprised by our group at midday and reciprocated our stares until we left them in peace.

D. Beckingham and Pam Agar

THE BREMER BAY AREA

Until late 1984 Bremer Bay possessed for us the mysterious magic that still clings to Wallal and Point Sampson. These far flung parts of W.A. by the precise science of the Dept of Meteorology are those places where winds and seas change. On the one hand low to moderate, on the other moderate to rough. I have often thought of the work which must have been involved in standing on all the good look-out points of the W.A. coast seeking the very spot where the changes occur. For Anne and I, the mystery largely vanished at Christmas/New Year 1984/5 for we stayed at Bremer Bay for three weeks. The magic remained, although differently, such that we spent a little over two weeks there at Christmas/New Year 1985/6 and plan to do the same in 1986/7.

Interestingly nearly all those persons to whom I have mentioned our visits to Bremer Bay have commented that they thought it only a figment of the meteorological imagination.

Bremer Bay has a number of chalets available for rent but the principal refuge of visitors is the one caravan park. Another is under construction, which will be a relief from the New Year period of over-crowding.

The current caravan park is ideally situated for the tired birdo. When camping at the sea end at the park, which adjoins dense bush, it is possible to sit outside the tent and without moving more than the binocular focus to espy at least 22 species. These included Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo, White-breasted Robin, Splendid Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren, Tawny Frogmouth, Varied Sittella, Red-eared Firetail and Western Spinebill.

Should the tired birdo need a short walk to work up an appropriate thirst about 100 metres brings into view the sand bar which usually cuts off the Wellstead Estuary from the Bay. Another 22 species are to be found here, including Avocet, Common Sandpiper, Little Egret, Hooded Plover, Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers and Chestnut Teal. Very possibly a greater variety are to be seen, for our investigation was largely limited to the camp-site over breakfast and the sand bar in the early evening after all day elsewhere.

Elsewhere for us has been the hinterland of Bremer Bay. Largely wheat/sheep country, though with two cattle properties, it looks very unpromising at first sight. However, there are substantial areas of low banksia bush and stands of trees. The interestingly named Swamp Road suggests other habitat and although dry, corrugated and dusty it does pass several swamp areas.

It has been the investigation of lakes and swamps that has largely occupied our time. Naturally in so doing, other than water-birds have been seen and our total species count was 113 in 84/5 and 120 in 85/6, with a total of 129 species in the two periods. While the tourist map illustrates lakes and swamps boldly, many prove remarkably elusive when on the ground and many require local knowledge of how to approach. An hours' exhausting struggle through dense bush on a compass bearing can be replaced with a visit to the land owner (often not the most obvious house) gaining the local knowledge which can allow driving almost to the water's edge.

The year 1979 was the last year of the big wet. Dramatic heavy falls are said to occur about once every ten years and 1979 was a big year. It is an odd sensation standing among trees 20 minutes brisk walk from a swamp to notice the 1979 high water mark above your head. Equally strange, having walked the twenty minutes to find a dessicated open space where water ought to be, is to notice old water-bird nests well above head-height. Dwardup, a very large lake, visible from the Bremer Bay Road, dried up this year just after New Years Day. The lake (called Ocumup on the maps - the local assistance to the map-makers got it quite wrong, we were informed by the real owner of Ocumup) has been drying up more and more each year since 1979. It will take another big wet to get it adequately re-started - and the water skiing it had for a year or so. The only salt lake in the area, at the foot of some impressive limestone cliffs, has been only temporarily

covered since 1980 and dry by early summer each year. In 1979 it was over 5 metres deep. Most of the lakes and swamps in the district show signs of covering a very great area from time to time. Fortunately for our bird watching and water-bird counting, the swamps have all been of manageable inspection size on each of our visits.

Bremer Bay hinterland is in a variable to marginal rain area. Several swamps which were wet in 1984/5 were dry in 1985/86, and to our surprise some which we expected to be low to dry were in fact deeper in 85/6 than the year before.

Anne and I have now visited 25 swamps, discovering a few new ones in 1985/6 as the word spread round that the two odd people from Perth were looking for swamps again. Naturally, we have always asked permission to enter any land. Many have given up their time to show us just how to reach their swamp (which has been invaluable) given us tea, cake and even dinner and told us about the local bird life and the rise and fall of the waters. A tribute needs to be paid to the local community for their help and interest. We try to thank each owner on leaving and give a brief highlight report and each year we have written to thank all those we have visited.

Each swamp is, of course, quite different, both in itself and surroundings. Some are extremely attractive and have beguiled us into a full day idling in and around the water. Yellilup is one of the more attractive and having a large catchment area (unusual in those parts) nearly always has water. Because of its catchment it is also important as a quality index for the area and although privately owned CALM have commenced to monitor it. Jeramungup Shire into which the Bremer area falls has an active soil conservation effort and the locals tell me it is now beginning to be appreciated that soil conservation (especially against salinity) embraces conservation of much more, with water birds an important part. In 1985/6 Yellilup was deeper than in the previous year and had a Barking Owl as well as about 1500 water birds. Outstanding among these were 25 Pacific Heron which were a fine sight when they took off together to circle and wheel overhead as they examined the unusual intruders. Intruders is the word at most of the swamps. The majority of owners say they have not visited their swamps for 2 or 3 years.

The Atlas 1 degree Block for Bremer Bay lists 168 species. Our 129 included 12 not listed in the Atlas - Pectoral Sandpiper, Lesser Golden Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Mongolian Plover, Curlew Sandpiper, Purple Swamphen, Little Egret, Wood Sandpiper, White-fronted Tern (probably), Freckled Duck, Darter and White-breasted Robin. The Robins were at the caravan camp site and the Darters in a swamp near Bremer Bay. They have bred there in both years of our visits, together with White-faced Heron and Grey Teal. In 1985/6 the Darters had birds nearly fully fledged, but still being fed, white fluffy chicks in the nest and chicks just hatched - with one egg still to go. Whether the Atlasers missed the swamp or whether the colony has started since we don't know, but these are apparently the only Darters in the Block.

We found three swamps with Purple Swamphen in 1984/5, which reduced to two in 1985/6 as one had dried. Again their non-reporting in the Atlas Block was a surprise. The other previously non-reported birds are all likely to be infrequent visitors (excepting the White-breasted Robin).

One of the swamps dry in 84/5 but wet in 85/66 had a breeding colony of Rufous Night Heron, obviously a regular breeding place to judge from the number of old nests. Slightly lower in the same large clump of melaleucas were the nests of Little Pied Cormorant. Pizzey, notes that Rufous Nigh Heron often nests with cormorants. The same swamp also had Freckled Duck (not previously reported from the Atlas Block).

The locals report not infrequent sightings of Royal Spoonbill (also not recorded in the Atlas) but we have yet to see them in the area. The swamp they frequent the most had none in 84/5 and was dry at our visit in 85/6.

We noticed two interesting differences in the bush bird situation between our two visits. Black-faced Wood-swallows were abundant in 84/5, but had largely vanished in 85/6 (only one was seen). Dusky Wood-swallows were then uncommon. In 85/6, however, Dusky Wood-swallows were breeding and abundant. In 1984/5 no Black-shouldered Kites were seen, but in 1985/6 six pairs were observed, one with three young. This seemed to reflect the marked increase in Black-shouldered Kites we noticed in the Gingin area from July 1985 onwards.

Other raptors readily and frequently seen are Square-tailed Kites, Whistling Kite, Brown Goshawk, Little Eagle, Spotted Harrier, Brown Falcon, Australian Kestrel and Marsh Harrier. An Australian Hobby was seen once. A Wedge-tailed Eagle was seen in 85/6 but not in the year previously and the locals informed us that Wedge-tailed Eagles have returned to the area after an absence of several years.

There are large areas of habitat suitable for the breeding of Marsh Harriers and they are frequently observed, but most often seen flying very low over the open paddocks. To judge from behaviour we found one nest in 84/5, - and in 85/6 saw a male displaying over a much larger female on the marshy ground.

All places are accessible by ordinary vehicle, although our "semi 4WD" Subaru has been useful in some places. It can be very hot at Christmas/New Year and is nearly always subject to strong breezes. A final word of caution - there are many more Tiger Snakes than usual in our experience at nearly all the swamps, with some of remarkable size, while the Tiger Snakes at one swamp make Benger seem uninhabited. Go carefully!

Bruce Buchanan

BOOK NOTES

AN OWL CAME TO STAY

by Claire Rome

Publisher Elek, London, 1979

Here is a book for all who are interested in wildlife and man's relations with the animal world. *An Owl Came to Stay* is the absorbing account of how the author, at her rural Dorset home, created a foster-home for injured and orphaned owls - and won a degree of acquaintanceship with her charges that few human beings can have been privileged to achieve.

Presented one day with a box containing a tiny orphaned owlet, Claire Rome was told that its return to the wild would be 'quite impossible'. This book is the triumphant story of how she proved that prediction untrue.

How do you go about your work when an owl insists on helping with the typing, or when two baby owls fight each other for the right to sit on your head? How do you care for a bird which is in a state of shock after being hit by a car? What do you say when you are offered a filleted mouse for tea? Situations like these are the story of six years of the author's life - six years in which she has discovered in herself unexpected gifts of communication with these birds and with many others which visit her rural garden.

'There is a lot that scientific study and the textbooks have left out', writes Claire Rome, 'things that only very close observations and sympathy with the living bird can reveal. I want to tell about owls from actually sharing their lives.' In this book she lifts a corner of the dark veil which makes owls mysterious and awesome creatures, to most people, and gives some fascinating glimpses of their real character and what goes on in their everyday lives.

An artist by profession, the author illustrated the book with her own drawings.

The above is the front dust jacket statement from the book. Attractively written without any anthropomorphic gush, it should be of interest to all birdos. It is available through branches of the Library and Information Service of W.A.

THE BIRDLIFE OF ROTTNEST ISLAND

Denis Saunders and Perry de Rebeira

This is a delightful book. It is a new style of bird book, written not purely as an identification guide but written to inform anyone who spares the time to read it. All the common birds of the island are well illustrated, though it is a shame the printers reduced the size of the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike picture. The information that is contained in the text shows what has been learned about the avifauna of the holiday island. Whether you are a hardened birder or a casual visitor to the island you could pick up this book and enjoy it as well as learn something. I hope there are more books like this published.

The book contains useful ecological information which could be helpful in making environmental decisions and has a wealth

of local knowledge previously unpublished.

A criticism is the authors use of English bird names not used by the RAOU. This failure continues the existing confusion of nomenclature and points to the urgent need for all bird naming authorities to act in concert.

The book is available from the RAOU office.

Geoff Shannon and Ron Van Delft.

NOTICES

BIRD ART EXHIBITION — JULY 26-30

The exhibition planned for the Perth Concert Hall, July 26-30 1986 took a step further on 19 March. A small gathering at the W.A. Museum on that day, with Dr Bennington representing the Museum and Mrs B. Wilson and several members of the W.A. Group Committee for the RAOU, witnessed the official hand-over of Mrs Jordan's ten bird paintings eight of which will be selected for printing by the Museum in card form. The paintings were displayed for the first time giving an opportunity to both congratulate and thank Mrs Jordan who was present.

Any member wishing to exhibit should contact Mrs B. Wilson (2931094) or the RAOU Canning Bridge office. The closing date for entries is 10 July 1986.

The exhibition will be officially opened by the Governor of W.A. in the late afternoon (5.30) of July 25th. The opening will be used by the committee as an opportunity to bring the RAOU to the notice of many W.A. decision makers and others to increase their awareness of birds and the work of the RAOU. At the same time the cards derived from Mrs. Jordan's paintings will be put on sale for the first time together with other RAOU publications and allied materials.

With the desire to invite a significant number of guests to increase knowledge of the RAOU, it will be necessary to limit the number of RAOU members able to attend the official opening. To defray the cost of refreshments a charge of \$3 per person will be made and an official invitation (necessary to gain admittance) can be booked by contacting Mrs. B Wilson (2931094) and making a request. First come first served.

The exhibition will be open to all from July 26-30 without charge. All paintings will be for sale. Make a note in your diary now.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Various people in the office are often asked for information about where to watch birds in different parts of the world, who to contact, what books are available. This information is in the heads of different people and it would be useful if we could put it together so that if somebody rings up it is readily available. If you possess any of this information could you please send it to the office. Please only give individual contact names if you are certain they would not mind and if you have an address that is going to be accurate for at least two years. It is probably best to give the name of a reserve and the official address of the warden rather than the wardens name. As far as books are concerned, if you can give price and availability it would be helpful. Please write and send to the office marked 'Travel Information'

I hope to carry out the same sort of thing for Western Australia in more detail, but wait for the next newsletter so we can introduce a structured format.

Thank you. Who knows we might even write "Where to Bird-watch in Australia".

Geoff Shannon

LAKE MEALUP : PROPOSED SANCTUARY LOOKS STRONGER

With the formation of a "Lake Mealup Preservation Society —, the moves to purchase the 160 ha block surrounding this important wetland are beginning to show some results. However, the best news so far came from the agent last week: she rang to say that the owner would be prepared to consider a 25% reduction from the original asking price of \$165,000.

This means that the target is now \$120,000, which is much more manageable. So much for the good news. The bad news is that we do not have anywhere near the required sum. Nor do we have any members who could be called "wealthy". The great majori-

ty of participants so far are retired people, pensioners and others on fixed incomes. If anybody can think of a way of diverting a little of the money being thrown at the "America's Cup" in our direction, we would be very pleased to hear of it.

For further information, please contact Jock McLaren on 381 6120, or write to 32 Coolgardie St., Subiaco, 6008.

MAGPIE STUDY

I am trying to find out about the dispersal of sub-adult Magpies from the territories in which they were born. I have colour-banded birds from 14 groups in Kings Park and Perry Lakes and would be most interested in sightings of banded birds in surrounding or more distant areas. I already have one record of a 2 year old bird having moved from Perry Lakes to Gooseberry Hill.

I can be contacted either at the Zoology Department, University of Western Australia on 380 2227 or at home on 382 2082.

Ludovic Schmidt.

PUBLICATIONS

YOU CAN BUY THE FOLLOWING ITEMS at the RAOU Office, Suite 30, first floor, 15 Ogilvie Rd, Canning Bridge 6153, W.A. Don't forget to add the cost of postage and packing if you are not calling to pick up purchases. Items are usually available for purchase at RAOU meetings and excursions.

This arrangement provides a service for members and much needed funds for the Group.

- * The Atlas of Australian Birds \$49
(produced by the RAOU : shows distribution of bird species)
- * overlays for the Atlas \$6
- * Methods for Censusing Birds in Australia - 1982 \$5
(produced by the W.A. Group, RAOU)
- * Report of the Middlesex Study Centre \$5
- * A Pocket List of Australian Birds 70 c
(a handy checklist ; produced by Canberra Ornithologists Group)
- * A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, by G. Pizzey \$17
(1985 reprint, paperback ; small format)
- * The Birds of Australia, by Simpson and Day \$30
(1984, large format ; text and plate facing each other)
- * Every Australian Bird Illustrated \$22
(large format ; 563 colour photos)
- * In Quest of Bower Birds, by N. Chaffer \$26
(large format ; text and photographs of all species)
- * A Field Guide to the Birds of W.A., by Storr and Johnstone \$14
(W.A. Museum 1985 edition ; solely birds of W.A.)
- * New Zealand Birds \$17
(1983 edition ; large format ; text and photographs by several authors)
- * The Birdlife of Rottne Island, by Saunders and de Rebeira \$8
(1985 ; text ; colour plates ; maps)
- * Eyre Bird Observatory : Report 1981-83 \$5
- * RAOU Calendar 1986 \$8
- * Bird- call tapes \$10
(3 choices ; mostly W.A. birds ; announced version)
- * RAOU Emu badges \$3
- * RAOU ties (navy blue or maroon) \$10
- * Western Australian Bird Notes \$1.50

If you have suggestions for titles that we could obtain, please give details to the W.A. Office. Please bear in mind that the W.A. Group is reluctant to spend money on bird books that do not sell readily.

Also, few local publishers or distributors are prepared to offer a discount on bird books. Consequently our choices are rather limited.

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

June 15	seabird watch - Fremantle
June 15	metro walk - Point Walter
June 16	meeting - Roger Jaensch - waterbirds
June 22-28	CAMPOUT - Kathleen Valley
July 12	day excursion - Boonanarring
July 26	metro walk - Star Swamp
July 28	meeting (informal) - metro birds
August 9	day excursion - Boyagin Rock
August 15-18	CAMPOUT - Balingup
August 25	meeting (informal) - waders
August 31	metro walk - Carine Swamp
September 13	day excursion - Neerabup/Jandabup
September 22	meeting - the Zoo Director
September 27-29	CAMPOUT - Tutanning
October 11/12	day excursion
October 19	Bird Week begins
October 27	meeting (informal)
November 8/9	day excursion
November 24	meeting (informal) - bush-birds
December 6	Three Park Search & Social Evening

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: e.g. 'a flock of unidentified cormorants', or 'a flock of Great Cormorants'.
- * a suggested method for recording dates and localities is, e.g. '11 May 1984, seven km SW of Moora' (i.e. 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 W.A. Office,

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

for September 86 issue - third Friday in July (18th).