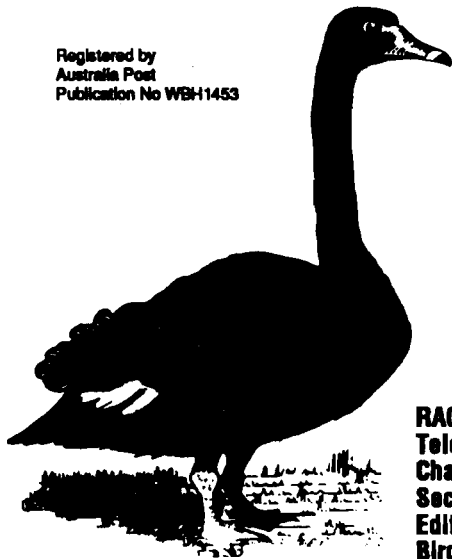


Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union



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MARSH HARRIER SEIZES COOT

The following took place on 28 May 1990 at Lake Yangebup. At 2.30pm a group of about 15 Eurasian Coots which were feeding at the water's edge moved rapidly into deeper water. I have noticed this often heralds the passage of a Marsh Harrier "cruising" at a height between 5 and 7 metres just offshore. On this occasion the Marsh Harrier appeared before the Eurasian Coots had reached deeper water. The Marsh Harrier turned and stooped, striking one of the hindmost of the Eurasian Coot without great force. The Marsh Harrier then settled on its prey and held it under water for about 10 minutes, possibly to drown it.

The point where this took place is in a wide area from the shore where the water was just deep enough for this act, and it seems possible the Marsh Harrier struck here deliberately. The Eurasian Coot was able to be held against the bottom of the lake by the Marsh Harrier's body and legs while its own belly just touched the surface. The ends of the Marsh Harrier's tail feathers were in the water.

At first the Marsh Harrier moved as if unsteady and a couple of times a wing of the Eurasian Coot flapped above the surface, showing the bird was still alive. After a while the Marsh Harrier rested still, looking very strange some 5 metres offshore in the calm water.

After some 10 minutes the harrier laboriously dragged the dead Eurasian Coot to the shore. It did this in several bursts, by rising just into the air on flapping wings and dragging with one leg fully extended and the Eurasian Coot hooked on its talons.

The Marsh Harrier settled at the edge of the water and fed for at least 30 minutes. At first it seemed to pluck feathers from the dead bird, then to rip bits of flesh. While feeding the Marsh Harrier had its back to the water and after almost every bite it moved its head as though looking along the shore in both directions and alert for intrusion.

A.J. Peacey

(The holding of the Eurasian Coot under water for ten minutes described above has striking similarity with Hollands (1984), who describes a Marsh Harrier holding an Eurasian Coot under water "for ten minutes" (p.134). However, the circumstances described by Peacey above and Hollands (1984) are rather different. The Marsh Harrier described by Hollands (1984) appeared, from the description given, to have killed the Eurasian Coot prior to holding its prey under water and Hollands (1984) attributes the ten minute period to the Marsh Harrier having "been tired" (p.134) as a result of earlier efforts to carry the Eurasian Coot to the shore, an attempt finally abandoned. Hollands (1984)

goes on to say he has seen Marsh Harriers "pluck birds (coot) out of a flock on the water and make off with apparent ease" (p.135). He also records an Eurasian Coot being caught, falling from a Marsh Harrier talons back into water and "far from being dead, sat up in the water, shook itself and swam off to rejoin the flock as though nothing had happened" (p.135). This description, showing that the striking and seizing of an Eurasian Coot by a Marsh Harrier does not automatically or even readily result in the early death of the bird taken, adds weight to the idea that the ten minute periods in both cases, may have been to kill the captured prey.

Ed.).

Reference:

Hollands, D (1984), *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia*, Nelson, Victoria.

OBSERVATIONS

Please send details of sightings to 'Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the RAOU. Unusual sightings should be accompanied by field notes. Preliminary checking of the following observations has been undertaken but further scrutiny should be given prior to inclusion in any official or technical report. This list of observations mainly covers the period from April to July 1990.

Compiled by Rodney Vervest.

DOWN SOUTH

Cape Petrel - 2, 15/7/90, North Mole - MC, BB, PH
Broad-billed Prion - 1 beach-washed, 7/6/90, Leighton Beach - GM
Little Shearwater - 1, beach-washed, Sorrento - Anon.
Pacific Heron - 1, 20/6/90, Della Road, Woodvale - JH, CW
Cattle Egret - 2, 20/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - JH, CW
Little Egret - 2, 15/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL * 1, 26/7/90, Lake Joondalup - GL
Eastern Reef Egret - 1, 13/6/90, Jurien marina - NT * 1, 15/7/90, North Mole - MC, BB, PH
Glossy Ibis - 2, 18/5/90, Thomsons Lake - TK * 8, 20/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - MBr * 5, 22/6/90, Herdsman Lake - MBr * 5, 5/7/90, Della Road, Woodvale - CW * 6, 18/7/90, Herdsman Lake - MCr * 6, 30/7/90, Herdsman Lake - MO
Sacred Ibis - 50+, 22/6/90, Guildford - AJM
Chestnut Teal - 1 pair, 18/5/90, Thomsons Lake - TK * 1, 21/5/90, Alfred Cove - JD * 1 male, 18/7/90, Lake Claremont - MCr
Pink-eared Duck - a pair with 2 ducklings, 18/7/90, Lake Claremont -

MCr

Hardhead - 4, 7/5/90, Alfred Cove - TK

Whistling Kite - 1, 28/6/90, Forrestdale Lake - PA * 14, 4/7/90, Baldvis Road - JH, PA

Marsh Harrier - 1, 24/6/90, Riverton Bridge - JH

Peregrine Falcon - 1, 16/5/90, Wesfeeds Bin, Bentley - JH

Australian Hobby - 1 immature road kill, 1/6/90, Morley - RS

Brown Quail - 10, 4/6/90, Albany - MC, BB

Black-tailed Native-hen - present, 16/6/90, Carine Swamp - JD * present, 9/7/90, Lake Monger - JR * 13, 20/7/90, Deepwater Lagoon, Gingin - JP, CW

Bush Thick-knee - 1 injured, 23/5/90, nr. Katanning - AH

Red-kneed Dotterel - 3, 18/5/90, Lake Claremont - MB, KC * 6, 20/7/90, Mogumber West Road (winter wet) - JP, CW

Hooded Plover - 2, 13/4/90, Cowaramup Beach - MBr

Banded Stilt - 300+, 9/6/90, Rottnest - MB, KC

Red-necked Stint - 200+, 28/6/90, Forrestdale Lake - PA

Great Skua - 2, 23/7/90, North Mole - MCr

Little Corella - 500, 12/6/90, Ellendale Pool, Greenough - NT

Western Rosella - 1, 30/6/90, Embleton Golf Course - FC

Pallid Cuckoo - 1, 18/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL * 1, 24/5/90, North Lake Reserve - JD

Fan-tailed Cuckoo - 1, 15/6/90, North Lake Reserve - JD

Red-backed Kingfisher - 1, 26/7/90, Brunswick Junction - GL

White-backed Swallow - 4, 2/6/90, Brookton - NT * 2, 15/6/90, Cervantes - NT * 2, 20/7/90, Mogumber West Road - JP, CW

Hooded Robin - 7, 7/4/90, Flynn Road-The Lakes - MC, BB

Red Wattlebird - 29+, 7/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - NH

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater - 1, 19/7/90, Guilderton - JP, CW

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater - 1, 29/6/90, Bateman - ED

Brown-headed Honeyeater - 3, 15/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL

White-cheeked Honeyeater - 8-12, 6/6/90, Swanbourne - PP

Australian Magpie-lark - 47, 4/7/90, Tonkin Highway, Maddington

RSm

UP NORTH

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 15, 28/6/90, between Carnarvon and Dorre Island - MCr

Black-tailed Native-hen - 57, 5/5/90, Hamelin Station - MC, BB

White-winged Tern - 1, 11/5/90, Broome Sewage Ponds - RN

Common Bronzewing - 10, 8/6/90, Wiluna Road from Leinster - NT

Black-eared Cuckoo - 1, 3/7/90, Dorre Island - MCr

Collared Kingfisher - 1, 18/4/90, Cape Keraudren - MC, BB

Yellow Wagtail - 2, 29/4/90, Roebuck Bay Caravan Park, Broome - MC, BB

Mangrove Robin - 2, 7/10/89, Cape Keraudren - BB et al

Kimberley Flycatcher - 2, 14/5/90, Crab Creek - RN

Clamorous Reed-Warbler - 1, 12/5/90, Broome - RN

Brown Songlark - 6, 2/7/90, Dorre Island - MCr

Redthroat - 6, 30/4/90, New Beach, Carnarvon - MC, BB

Slaty-backed Thornbill - 2, 10/6/90, The Granites-Mt Magnet - AJ, RJ

Black Honeyeater - several, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN * 20-30, 10/7/90, East Pilbara - AJ et al

Pied Honeyeater - 1, 16/4/90, 100km south of Nanutarra - MC, BB * several, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN

Red-headed Honeyeater - 10, 30/4/90, Broome - MC, BB * 1, 13/5/90, Broome - RN

Red-browed Pardalote - 2, 16/4/90, Lyndon River - MC, BB * 1, 3/5/90, Ashburton River, Nanutarra

Painted Firetail - 6+, 25/4/90, Karratha-Roebourne Road - RN

Masked Woodswallow - many, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN

KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

AH - Anne Hepworth	MBr - Mary Bremner
AJ - Allan Jones	MC - Margery Clegg
AJM - A J Malcolm	MCr - M Craig
BB - Bryan Barrett	MO - Margaret Owen
CW - Chris Wilder	NH - Neil Hamilton
ED - Elizabeth Davies	NT - N Tyrer
FC - Fred Coles	PA - Peter Anson
GL - Graham Lintle	PH - Peel Howden
GM - George Miller	PP - Peter Piggford
JD - Jack Donohoe	RJ - Rose Jones
JH - Jack Hunt	RN - Richard Nowotny
JP - Julian Pegler	RS - Ray Shulz
JR - John Roberts	RSm - Rod Smith
KC - Kate Creed	TK - Tony Kirkby
MB - Max Bailey	

WATERBIRD STUDIES

SCOPEWEST

Greetings to all SCOPEWESTERS !

To those members not already taking part why not ring the office and enquire about the action-packed world of the 'wetfoot'.

Progress has been excellent. April was the best survey month so far with almost complete coverage. A few minor sites (probably dry) were left out.

Monthly totals of individual waterbirds using SCOPEWEST wetlands so far are as follows:

October	31,769
January	58,482
April	38,579

Further work on the computer programme will allow us a more detailed analysis later in the project.

Significant falls of rain over much of the study area in July have resulted in good levels of water in many wetlands. I hope none of you were caught in those tremendous storms that lashed the coast at this time, one of which resulted in a fairly heavy fall of hail in southern parts of the study area. The Meteorological Bureau reported a 'car being buried up to its wheel arches'!

Waterbird numbers at Scopewest wetlands have been low overall due to dispersal but the amount of water in certain parts of the study area should result in a good breeding season. With this in mind I would like to request that you all brush up on the techniques used in filling out the breeding section on the Scopewest data sheet. Instructions can be found on pages four and five of the Field Record Book. October, the next survey month, is an important month in which we should make maximum efforts to locate and record details of breeding activity. Please call me at the office if you wish to discuss any aspects of the survey.

The wing and nasal tagging programme will also commence again in October and anyone interested in being involved should contact me at the office. Your participation is welcome and this activity provides a unique opportunity for volunteers to see waterbirds at close hand and often at their breeding grounds. Although 'messy' at times (air raids!) causing volunteers to suffer considerable indignity, no one has been 'attacked' or inadvertently been fitted with a nasal saddle.

There are many reports of nasal-tagged ducks on metropolitan lakes but few reports outside the metro area. It will be very interesting to note any records of tagged ducks in the south-west during the next Annual Waterfowl Count in November 1990. Observers are requested to keep a sharp eye out for ducks, specifically Pacific Black Ducks and also egrets, spoonbills, ibis and White-faced Heron. Interesting movements have occurred recently - a Great Egret banded on the south coastal plain was seen at Katanning and a Straw-necked Ibis banded in the same area, was noted at Broome.

Finally, a detailed preliminary report should have been sent to you some months back. If you have not received it, please call and I will arrange for a copy to be sent. A report on Scopewest will be presented in the forthcoming National RAOU Newsletter also.

ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNT

The Annual Waterfowl Count is scheduled to run from Saturday 17th November to Sunday 25th November. This may be the last November count we conduct as funding for this project will only last until the March count in 1991. As this will possibly be our last chance to do a coordinated count during the breeding season I would like to ensure we cover all wetlands. If you know anyone who can help, particularly in country areas, please get them to call me at the RAOU Office (364 6202). The recruiting letter will go out to all regular duck counters in mid-September and I urge you to respond quickly. If you are not a duck counter, now would be

an opportune time to join this legendary team. Remember, if you see a chance for covering any extra areas during the count period, ring me and I will arrange a wetland 'package' for you.

R Vervest

PEAT MINING - LAKE MUIR NATURE RESERVE

Earlier in the year, a proposal to mine peat at Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon (Lake Muir Nature Reserve) was submitted for public comment by the Environmental Protection Authority.

Those of you who have visited this nature reserve (60 kms east of Manjimup) will have experienced the rich and varied birdlife in surroundings that have a distinct grandeur. Lake Muir itself is 11 kms long by 4 kms wide and has been known to support up to 50,000 waterfowl (Annual Waterfowl Count, March 1989).

A series of fresh/brackish lagoons (within the nature reserve) grace the eastern side of Lake Muir and also support a good variety of waterbirds.

RAOU attention was drawn to the reserve in 1981 with the commencement of the South-west Waterbird Study - a collaborative effort between the RAOU and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Data was gathered regularly from Lake Muir and some 280 other wetland nature reserves. The results of this five year project culminated in the publishing of a substantial report in 1988 (RAOU Report No. 30 1988, Waterbirds in Nature Reserves of South-Western Australia).

During these early surveys, the importance of the lagoons was recognised for the occurrence of the rare Australasian Bittern. In an effort to gather more information on the breeding ecology of this species and document seasonal abundance of waterbirds, the RAOU and CALM devised a one year study at Byenup Lagoon. This wetland is the northernmost of a series of three major wetlands east of Lake Muir. During the monthly surveys data were also collected on Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon, the proposed mine site, in itself a significant wetland and known to support the Australasian Bittern (see RAOU Report No. 47).

The combined studies, with occasional other surveys, amount to eight years of data collection, the result of efforts by many RAOU members and professional ornithologists, such that the RAOU and CALM are able to comment authoritatively on the many natural features of the reserve.

The mining company has held leases in the reserve since 1971 and has mined peat in nearby wetlands for a number of years. Entirely within existing rights, the company forwarded a proposal to extract peat for 20, possibly 40 years, at Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon.

Lake Muir Nature Reserve is classed 'C', affording only a minimal protection status and the current leases have been a 'stumbling block' in upgrading the status to 'A', a rating, by all criteria it truly deserves. The nature reserve was considered for nomination under the RAMSAR convention (see elsewhere in this issue) which would have placed it within the context of global significance. The reserve was eventually not submitted for nomination; the decision being complicated by mining lease arrangements.

The Environmental Protection Authority, after considering some 50 separate submissions - both RAOU and CALM lodging substantial documents - published its response to the mining proposal in June 1990, putting two recommendations:

Recommendation 1 - The Environmental Protection Authority concludes that the mining company has not demonstrated the environmental acceptability of the proposal to mine peat from Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon and produce carbon products, as described in the Public Environmental Review, and recommends that the proposal not proceed.

Recommendation 2 - The Environmental Protection Authority recommends that the classification of the Lake Muir Nature Reserve (No. 31880) be amended from 'C' class to 'A' class as a matter of priority.

The Environmental Protection Authority recommendations bode well for the future. It represents a commitment at a significant

level to the preservation of wetlands and in no small part, the RAOU, particularly members who have gathered data at the Reserve, have played a vital role in the outcome.

R Vervest

RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat was prepared and adopted at a conference held in Ramsar, Iran in 1971. The conference was convened by the Government of Iran and was sponsored by the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) with co-sponsors, including the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the International Biological Programme, the International Council for Bird Preservation and the World Wildlife Fund.

As a member State of the United Nations, Australia is automatically involved in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), established in 1972, while also a member of UNESCO and FAO as well as being a State member of IUCN through the Department of Home Affairs and Environment. Australia is also a member State of IWRB, the Executive Officer of the RAOU, Dr. P. Moors being the non-government member.

Criteria for the Ramsar Convention for identifying Wetlands of International Importance are that:

A Wetland should be considered internationally important if it:

- regularly supports either 10,000 ducks, geese and swans, or 10,000 coots, or 20,000 waders or;
- regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or sub species of waterfowl or;
- regularly supports 1% of the breeding pairs in a population of one species or sub species of waterfowl.

General criteria for identifying Wetlands are that wetlands should:

- support an appreciable number of rare, vulnerable or endangered species or sub species of plant or animal, or;
- be of special value for obtaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the quality of peculiarities of its flora and fauna or;
- be of special value as the habitat of plants or animals at a critical stage of their biological cycles or;
- be of special value for its endemic plant and animal species or communities.

The value of representative or unique wetlands may be considered internationally important if the wetland is a particularly good example of a specific type of wetland characteristic of its region.

Prior to 1990 there were twenty-four Australian wetlands on the Ramsar list. Two of these were in the Northern Territory, ten in Tasmania, ten in Victoria and two in New South Wales. Western Australia had no wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention. In July this year the Minister for Environment in the Western Australian Government announced that nine wetlands in Western Australia had been accepted for the Ramsar Convention list of wetlands of international importance. The wetlands approved are - the Ord River Flood Plain, Argyle and Kununurra Lakes, Roebuck Bay, Eighty Mile Beach, Forrestdale and Thompsons Lakes, Peel-Yalgurup System, Lake Toolibin, Vasse-Wonnerup System and the Lake Warden System.

It will be noted the nine wetlands are not all geographically specific and may vary from year to year - e.g. the Ord River Flood Plain. This is because it is the intention of the Convention to give general protection to the systems involved.

It is possible that Lakes McLeod, Gregory and Muir (among others) fall within the criteria for the Ramsar Convention. However insufficient data on these Lakes appears to be available to justify their inclusion at present.

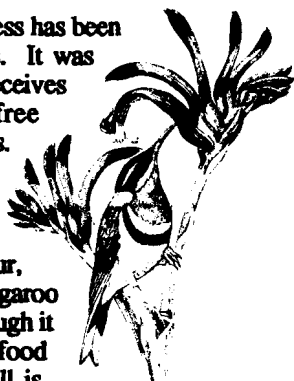
The additional protection offered to the named wetlands is most welcome.

RAOU CONGRESS 1991

LOGO COMPETITION

The logo for next year's Congress has been chosen and can be seen above. It was submitted by Jenny Hunt who receives for her talent and efforts free registration to the 1991 Congress.

The Western Spinebill is an attractive small honeyeater, endemic to the South West. Our logo depicts a common behaviour, feeding on nectar from the kangaroo paw (WA's floral emblem), though it uses many native plants as food sources. The Western Spinebill is fairly easily seen in most bush areas near Perth and in other parts of the South West.



THE CONGRESS

Planning is well under way. Kingswood College is the Congress venue and the Campout at Albany follows immediately from Sunday to Friday with a range of activities to suit all birders' interests. Both Congress and Campout will be well worth attending.

The dates: Congress 20 Sep - 22 Sep 1991
Campout 22 Sep - 27 Sep 1991

The organisers wish to hear from those planning to attend the Congress and/or Campout and from those who wish to present papers. Poster presentations are also welcomed.

Please 'phone or write to the RAOU (WA Group) office in Perth.

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Daily recordings of birds seen within a 2km radius of Eyre Bird Observatory have resulted in some interesting trends. In February the rainfall was lower than average and the number of birds drinking at the birdbaths began to increase. In March the rainfall was 1.6mm, compared with an average of 25mm, and the total monthly count for the following birds was:

Brush Bronzewing	1000+
Pink Cockatoo	3500+
Australian Raven	2500+

Once the rains came numbers decreased until the total count in June was:

Brush Bronzewing	94
Pink Cockatoo	278
Australian Raven	89

The honeyeater numbers also increased as the nearby mallee trees began to blossom. Eleven species were recorded from April to June, Singing Honeyeater and New Holland Honeyeater being the most common, while the Yellow-plumed and White-fronted were the least common. During a banding session in June a Brown-headed Honeyeater banded 9 December 1985 was retrapped. A Spotted Pardalote was found dead during the Honeyeater Follow-up course. The specimen has been taken to the W.A. Museum for confirmation.

Weekly beach counts have continued with up to 12 species being recorded. One Oriental Pratincole and two Red-kneed Dotterel were seen on 25 April whilst two groups of Banded Stilt (20+) were seen on 3 May. Red-necked Stint were recorded during April and May, but none since. Red-capped Plover numbers

peaked in April (600+) and at the Nine Mile quite large numbers of Silver Gulls were recorded for March (380+) and May (320+). Since then weed banks have developed along the beach and bird totals have decreased. It will be interesting to follow these trends into the next quarter.

G. and G. Goodreid

BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

Although it is a long time since our last report, many things have happened in the interim. The report of our first course appears elsewhere in this WA Bird Notes, so we will make this article relatively short.

Admitting that facts and figures tend to be boring, the upsurge in our attendance numbers this year are dramatic. To reduce the figures to their simplest form we will refer only to Visitor Nights and Day Visitors. These are the categories we used at Eyre. In Broome we further divide into categories, Chalet/units, campers and caravanners, Day visitors, tours and school excursions.

In 1988 (9 months) we had 633 Visitor Nights and 829 Day Visitors. In 1989 we had only a slight increase in Visitor Nights (although revenue was considerably higher), but Day Visitors numbered 1471. During the first 7 months of 1990 we have already had 1466 Visitor Nights and 1671 Day Visitors. Obviously all this activity has made a noticeable impact on our earnings, but we do not expect to break even this year, while we are running right up to our budget projections. The Day Visitors take up a great deal of our time for a very small return.

The BBO birdlist continues to grow. It presently stands at 228 species, with some notable recent additions. These include Crimson, Orange and Yellow Chat, Oriental Cuckoo, Australian and Baillon's Crake, Banded Stilt, White-fronted Honeyeater and Yellow-throated Miner. The latter are common enough at Derby but are the first recorded here.

Our deluge of visitors would have stopped our building programmes entirely were it not for the volunteer workers we've been fortunate enough to attract in 1990. Michael Craig made a return trip here during the wet and did another excellent piece of work. Doug Watkins and Shapelle McNee were relief wardens during our holidays followed by Richard Johnson and Kathryn Newton from Townsville. They remained after we returned and their contribution has been beyond praise. Martin Cross and Tessa Rule from the UK were two more willing and able workers. BBO is finally moving. It will be even better next year.

G. Hooper
B. Wells

NOTICES

Until further notice please direct all communications to the Editor, WA Bird Notes to the RAOU office, Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge WA 6153, owing to a forthcoming change of residential address.

GENERAL MEETINGS

A charge of 50 cents is made at the monthly meetings to cover the hire of the venue (and provide supper). The charge barely covers these expenses. If those attending meetings will please pay 50 cents on arrival it will be appreciated.

LESUEUR FORUM

An art exhibition, coinciding with National Art Week (13-20 October), is being organised by the Lesueur Forum to gain publicity and funds. It will be advertised in the newspapers, which will give venue and other details. Your support is requested.

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

BBO'S FIRST COURSE

The first course to be held at Broome Bird Observatory was conducted from 21 to 27 April, 1990—the title being “Wave the Waders Goodbye”. The popularity of both the subject and the area attracted 15 people. We came from far and wide—some from the Eastern states, the majority from Perth and a couple from as close as Karratha. Statistically, we saw during seven concentrated and at times exhausting days of birdwatching, over 140 species of birds. Most of course were waders, but bushbirds were not neglected. The Observatory is situated in one of those unique areas where both types of avian fauna can be observed with comparative ease.

Our days were full as the species list indicates. Most mornings we were on the move by 5.30 to ‘ablute’, snatch a hasty breakfast, and be ready for our energetic Wardens by 6.30. Then it was off in the transport over the rugged roads to our chosen destination.

The first day was spent on a two to three hour walk along the “Malurus Trail”, following the boundary fence-line of Roebuck Plains station to Crab Creek. The more energetic walked back along the beach. The excursion introduced the group to the various types of habitat within easy reach of the Observatory. As the week advanced most were able to investigate the area in their own time and undoubtedly added to their individual bird lists—indeed, we even added two new species to the Observatory’s list: the Orange Chat and the Yellow Chat.

Next day we drove to Barred Creek, a lovely part of the coast north of Broome partly covered by mangroves within which we found Red-headed Honeyeater, Broad-billed Flycatcher and abundant Yellow White-eye, as well as many other species. As we walked out to the point, our party was ‘buzzed’ by a light aircraft which, to our annoyance, disturbed several Grey-tailed Tattler and a single Lesser Golden Plover in breeding plumage. However, it proved a blessing in disguise as two Beach Thick-knee, which we had previously seen in the far distance, rose, flew across the Creek and landed within a few metres of where we stood; so we all had excellent views of these unusual birds.

Before the break for lunch two members of the party saw two Least Frigatebird flying overhead. They were rewarded during the evening bird-call with a packet of Smarties: the accolade bestowed by the Warden each evening for the most meritorious sighting of the day.

On Monday we went to Broome to view its ‘tourist attractions’. It was one of our hottest days, but one on which we added many new species to our lists. On the two ovals we found Little Curlew and a party of Yellow Wagtail in breeding plumage—a good start. We spent a couple of hours among the sewage ponds—a favourite spot for waders—and in the surrounding bush found a Horsfield’s Bronze-cuckoo and several species of honeyeater, including the only White-throated Honeyeater seen during the course. We lunched in the Wildlife Park after checking the artificial lakes where we watched at close quarters two Australian Crake which, like the Clamorous Reed Warbler and Plumbed Whistling-Duck, appear to have taken up residence.

We spent two days being instructed in wader identification along the beaches of Roebuck Bay. Under the Wardens’ guidance we gradually learned to identify the thousands of waders as they lined up on the shoreline when their feeding grounds were flooded by the incoming tide. Many were in breeding plumage and we were all able to see the difference in colouration between the Red and Great Knot, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit and even locate the odd Asian Dowitcher. The Wardens also pointed out the difference between the Large Sand Plover and the Mongolian Plover, both being in breeding plumage. There were also lighter moments and frustration, when we had crept to a vantage point,

glasses and telescopes at the ready to view a beach thick with small waders only to have these scattered by a single beach walker with dog, strolling stolidly past.

On Wednesday we drove to Lake Eda, on Roebuck Plains station, now reserved by the new owner for the preservation of birdlife. During our walk round the Lake many different species of waders and ducks were noted, including a single Blue-billed Duck which probably had made its way from the Wildlife Park. Flocks of Brolga flew in to drink and we watched both species of Harrier and a Black-breasted Buzzard in the distance. Before leaving we had a welcome “cuppa” and enjoyed a slice of Gail’s traditional chocolate cake. Brice then led us to where we had excellent views of Orange Chats—the males in the sun making a fine sight.

Our last day was celebrated by a walk through the mangroves at Crab Creek. This proved somewhat more hazardous than usual as we had been experiencing a series of exceptionally high tides which caused the creek to refill far quicker than usual. However, the party of six who accompanied Gail through the mangroves and defied the mud and mosquitoes, were rewarded by sightings of the Mangrove Golden Whistler and the White-breasted Whistler, as well as other mangrove species.

Apart from the birding, we had some lighter events to relieve the serious aspects of the course. One was the presence of a large green tree-frog which had taken up residence in the ablutions block and spent most of its time within the toilet system. It was reported that some were startled by a pair of cold, clammy hands! Another time a mouse announced its presence on the trip to Barred Creek in the ‘Camel’ by running down backs, up legs, ending in Brice’s lap as he drove!

After a very enjoyable and informative week at the Observatory we left with memories of good fellowship and superlative meals provided by our hostess, Gail. And last, but very far from least, we greatly appreciated the expert advice and tuition given to us the Wardens.

M. Clegg and B. Barrett

List of birds seen during course 21-27 April, includes BBO, Crab Creek, Roebuck Plains Station, Lake Eda, Broome townsite, the Wildlife Park, Sewage Works and Barred Creek.

Hoary-headed Grebe	Curlew Sandpiper
Australasian Grebe	Oriental Pratincole
Australian Pelican	Australian Pratincole
Brown Booby	Silver Gull
Darter	Whiskered Tern
Pied Cormorant	White-winged Tern
Little Black Cormorant	Gull-billed Tern
Little Pied Cormorant	Caspian Tern
Least Frigatebird	Little Tern
White-faced Heron	Crested Tern
Great Egret	Lesser Crested Tern
Little Egret	Peaceful Dove
Eastern Reef Egret (dark phase)	Diamond Dove
Black-necked Stork	Bar-shouldered Dove
Sacred Ibis	Crested Pigeon
Straw-necked Ibis	Red-tailed Black Cockatoo
Royal Spoonbill	Little Corella
Wandering Whistling-Duck	Red-collared Lorikeet
Plumed Whistling-Duck	Red-winged Parrot
Black Swan	Horsfield’s Bronze-Cuckoo
Pacific Black Duck	Southern Boobook
Grey Teal	Tawny Frogmouth
Pink-eared Duck	Blue-winged Kookaburra
Hardhead	Red-backed Kingfisher
Blue-billed Duck	Sacred Kingfisher
Osprey	Rainbow Bee-eater
Black-shouldered Kite	Singing Bushlark
Black Kite	Tree Martin
Black-breasted Buzzard	Richard’s Pipit
Brahminy Kite	Yellow Wagtail
Whistling Kite	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Brown Goshawk	White-winged Triller
Collared Sparrowhawk	Jacky Winter
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Mangrove Golden Whistler
Spotted Harrier	Rufous Whistler
Marsh Harrier	White-breasted Whistler
Brown Falcon	Grey Shrike-thrush
Australian Hobby	Broad-billed Flycatcher

Australian Kestrel
 Australian Cuckoo
 Eurasian Coot
 Brolga
 Beach Thick-knee
 Pied Oystercatcher
 Sooty Oystercatcher
 Masked Lapwing
 Grey Plover
 Lesser Golden Plover
 Red-kneed Dotterel
 Mongolian Plover
 Large Sand Plover
 Red-capped Plover
 Black-fronted Plover
 Black-winged Stilt
 Red-necked Avocet
 Ruddy Turnstone
 Eastern Curlew
 Whimbrel
 Little Curlew
 Wood Sandpiper
 Grey-tailed Tattler
 Common Sandpiper
 Greenshank
 Marsh Sandpiper
 Terek Sandpiper
 Snipe: Gallinago sp.
 Asian Dowitcher
 Black-tailed Godwit
 Bar-tailed Godwit
 Red Knot
 Great Knot
 Sharp-tailed Sandpiper
 Red-necked Stint

Leaden Flycatcher
 Restless Flycatcher
 Grey Fantail
 Northern Fantail
 Willie Wagtail
 Grey-crowned Babbler
 Clamorous Reed-Warbler
 Brown Songlark
 Red-backed Fairy-wren
 Dusky Gerygone
 White-throated Gerygone
 Little Friarbird
 Singing Honeyeater
 Grey-headed Honeyeater
 White-throated Honeyeater
 White-gaped Honeyeater
 Brown Honeyeater
 Rufous-throated Honeyeater
 Red-headed Honeyeater
 Crimson Chat
 Orange Chat
 Yellow Chat
 Mistletoebird
 Yellow White-eye
 Zebra Finch
 Double-barred Finch
 Long-tailed Finch
 Olive-backed Oriole
 Great Bowerbird
 Australian Magpie-lark
 White-breasted Woodswallow
 Black-faced Woodswallow
 Pied Butcherbird
 Australian Magpie
 Torresian Crow



Bar-tailed Godwit and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Roebuck Bay
 Photo by D. MacGibbon

FURTHER COMMENT ON 'DECLINE IN NUMBERS OF AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE'

The reports of declining numbers of Australian Magpies from E. Sedgwick in Harvey, and M. Whackett in Perth, were of great interest to us.

We are speculating that our local decline could be due to changes in land useage, orchards being replaced by increased acreages of commercial vegetable growing. We read of a study by University of Helsinki (B.T.O. News 1990) on differences in breeding success in six Starling colonies. Starlings, like Australian Magpies, are ground foragers and the Helsinki findings could be relevant.

Starling colonies in old mixed farming areas successfully reared 70-90% of nestlings. Colonies in specialised cereal or sugar beet production areas raised only 20-30% of young. The authors concluded that replacement of mixed farming by specialised monoculture resulted in a reduction of foraging for adults and so were unable to provide sufficient for their young.

We cannot imagine Royal Perth Golf Club or Royal Perth Rehabilitation Hospital have taken to producing commercial vegetable crops but have there been changes in their ground maintenance work? Similarly in Harvey Shire. Changes in the use of herbicides and pesticides might result in reduced foraging

opportunities for adult Magpies resulting in reduced breeding success and fewer young fledged.

Regarding Australian Magpies and Australian Ravens. A pair of the latter nested each year 500m from our property. As long as we had resident groups of Australian Magpies the Australian Ravens and their young bypassed us: they had a regular travelling route along the boundary line separating two Australian Magpie group territories, there was no trespassing.

Now the Australian Ravens come to dine on our figs and peaches - and anything else they can get their beaks into! It would appear Australian Magpies are susceptible to environmental changes and are probably reflecting similar effects in other bird species. Australian Magpies are big and bold enough to be readily observed and could repay more careful observation as monitors of an environment.

R. & M. Brown

Reference: B.T.O.

News No 166 Jan-Feb 1990, Dr Juha Tiainen Osmis Fennica 66 41-48.

FISHING THE OSPREY WAY

On an overcast day in late February I noticed an Osprey flying just north of the Attadale shoreline and being harried in a half-hearted way by a Silver Gull. The Osprey ignored the gull, swung back further into the estuary and started diving for fish. In each case the dive was initiated by a gentle roll to the left, the dive angle about 25 degrees, the wing beat much shallower than in normal flight and the beat frequency slightly higher than normal. The Osprey appeared to fly directly into the water without altering the flight pattern in any discernable way. The entry created a large splash which masked the subsequent take-off and the Osprey appeared out of the spray climbing normally.

I watched the bird complete six dives without catching a fish. On the completion of the seventh dive, the bird remained in the water, which was belly deep to it and started preening. It continued to do so for about a minute and a half. The Osprey then made two more unsuccessful dives before again finishing in shallow water and going through a short spell of preening. It then flew off over the northern shore and out of sight.

I was taken aback by the way the Osprey flew directly into the water on each dive. There was no finesse, no easing of the angle, it was just smash - straight in.

P. Anson

A VISIT TO LAKE POONGKALIYARRA

Travellers to the North should include a visit to the Harding Dam, (Lake Poongkaliyarra) which was opened in 1985 to supplement the water supply from the Millstream Aquifer to serve the developing areas of Dampier, Karratha, Cape Lambert, Wickham, Roebourne and Port Samson.

There is a good Water Authority unsealed road from Karratha to the dam area, a distance of some 25kms. An attractive recreational and grassed picnic area surrounds the tree lined pool immediately downstream from the dam wall.

A wide variety of habitats are found in close proximity, including the large water expanses of the lake, small reedy pools, fringing riverine vegetation, flood plains, spinifex and shrub plains and dolerite screes and gorges.

Bird surveys have been carried out by the Water Authority of W.A. both before and after the dam construction. Surveys since construction include 16 species of waterbirds not recorded prior to the construction. It can be assumed that some of these species would have been attracted by the expansion of the water habitat while others could have been present during early surveys.

The writers visited the area on three occasions (June 30, July 3 and 4) and covered all types of habitat and carried out a survey of the lake and area adjacent to Table Top Hill. The number of waterbirds visible on this survey is recorded in the list below but

does not indicate totals for the whole area of the lake.

As is shown there is a wide diversity of species and large numbers of birds in the area. At the Recreation Pool there is a colony of some 70 Rufous Night Heron including many immature birds.

Throughout the area large flocks of Crimson Chats were observed feeding on the ground on the flood plain or in acacia scrub on the spinifex plains. No fully coloured males were observed in any of the flocks.

Nine Plumed Whistling Duck were seen at the Recreation Pool. This species has not previously been recorded in this area.

A survey of birds in this area was carried out by Rodney Vervest in April 1988.

Because of the recent development of the area as a refuge for waterbirds and the great variety of other birds present, perhaps records should be added to the National Parks survey.

L. & M. Whisson, A. & R. Jones

Lake Poongkaliyarra Recreation and Catchment Area - 30/6/90-4/7/90

*9 Australasian Grebe	Galah (u)
3 Australian Pelican	Little Corella (a)
6 Darter	Cockatiel (u)
7 Pied Cormorant	Pallid Cuckoo (i)
20 Little Pied Cormorant	Blue-winged Kookaburra (u)
23 Little Black Cormorant	Red-backed Kingfisher (u)
12 Pacific Heron	Sacred Kingfisher (u)
20 White-faced Heron	Rainbow Bee-eater (c)
10 Great Egret	Tree Martin (a)
1 Little Egret	Fairy Martin (c)
70 Rufous Night Heron	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike (c)
*2 Glossy Ibis	White-winged Triller (u)
22 Straw-necked Ibis	Grey Shrike-thrush (i)
*9 Plumed Whistling-Duck	Willie Wagtail (a)
39 Black Swan	Clamorous Reed-warbler (i)
30 Pacific Black Duck	Rufous Songlark (c)
45 Grey Teal	Brown Songlark (i)
*8 Hardhead	Variegated Fairy-wren (u)
Whistling Kite (c)	Yellow-throated Miner (c)
Little Eagle (c)	Singing Honeyeater (c)
* Marsh Harrier (1st year)(i)	Grey-headed Honeyeater (u)
Australian Hobby (i)	White-plumed Honeyeater (a)
Brown Falcon (c)	Brown Honeyeater (a)
Australian Kestrel (c)	Crimson Chat (a)
700 Eurasian Coot	Striated Pardalote (u)
30 Red-kneed Dotterel	Painted Firetail (a)
40 Black-fronted Plover	Zebra Finch (a)
*8 Black-winged Stilt	Australian Magpie-lark (c)
1 Common Sandpiper	Little Woodswallow (c)
Peaceful Dove (c)	Pied Butcherbird (u)
Diamond Dove (c)	Australian Magpie (i)
Crested Pigeon (c)	Little Crow (c)
Spinifex Pigeon (a)	Torresian Crow (c)

* Species recorded since the creation of Lake Poongkaliyarra (i) = individual (u) = uncommon (c) = common (a) = abundant

RANDOM THOUGHTS ON EGGS, HABITAT AND SHOOTING

Earlier this year WABN mentioned in the course of an article, that a probable cuckoo was removed from a nest. This action appeared to enable two honeyeaters to develop, fledge and leave the nest. The Editor of WA Bird Notes received two letters about this matter, both commenting on the impropriety and even illegality of the action.

It happened that these letters were received about the time the two year moratorium on duck shooting in the South-West was lifted, so that between "6 o'clock in the forenoon of Sunday 14th January 1990, until fifteen minutes after seven o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday 11th February 1990" (Government Gazette WA) there was open season in respect of specified wild duck within specified areas of the boundaries of the South-West and Eucla Land Division. Duck which could be shot were Australian Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Australian Shoveler, Pink-eared Duck, Hardhead and Maned Duck. No letter or comment on this was received by the Editor and the contrast between the events was provocative of some thought.

As may be recalled, there was a good deal of concern expressed

at the resumption of duck shooting and there were minor encounters between shooters and those opposed to shooting, particularly around Lake Wannamal. Interestingly, in the same Government Gazette WA, as announced the South-West shooting season (22 December 1989) there was also announced open season on all the above mentioned ducks, together with Wandering and Plumed Whistling-Duck, for the whole of 1990, for the whole of the Kimberley, Northwest and Eastern Land Divisions. This matter appears to either have gone unnoticed or be of little concern, for no anti-shooting protests continue. This seems a strangely contrary situation, or a commentary on the politics of protest.

It seems equally contrary to condemn the taking of a single duck egg, when within a few weeks it becomes perfectly legitimate to shoot the rest of the same clutch. Equally, it seems difficult to reconcile the condemnation of the destruction of a single cuckoo, which preserved (in the specific case) the life of two other honeyeaters, while not condemning shooting and the widespread destruction and degradation of habitat which continues in Western Australia (and which may worsen with the essential final limits now reached for farming land). Such loss of habitat destroys or severely reduces opportunities for the survival of many birds and species of birds. The work of Saunders in the wheatbelt (see WABN No 52 December 1989) has been in part to endeavour to determine the level of total bird and species reduction in the region. His preliminary conclusions seemed hardly encouraging.

One of the letters concerning the cuckoo incident referred to "an illegal act". It is possible to consider any matter in a number of ways, e.g. ethically, economically, legally and scientifically (not mutually exclusive of course). The RAOU policy on Duck Hunting (13th February 1988) specifically spurns the ethical or moral approach and emphasises the scientific - which seems a reasonable position, given the nature of the RAOU.

Unfortunately, as all members will be aware, scientific data on all Australian birds, including waterbirds, is relatively scanty and barely adequate for the development of scientifically based policies. Indeed the RAOU policy recommendations for scientific study are so massive as to be unlikely to be seriously considered for many years. The first recommendation alone, that there should be produced and published "an annual Australia-wide survey of the timing, duration, distribution and success of waterfowl breeding events" gives some idea of the magnitude of the scientific questions posed.

An aside: there is also a strange recommendation that research should be carried out into possible lead poisoning of waterfowl and carrion feeding birds, so that when identified, steel shot only be used in such wetlands as are affected. This seems like saying smoking is bad for your lungs and recommending regular monitoring, so you will be able to give up smoking when cancer is detected).

Legal approaches have the disadvantage of being readily alterable through the political process, (witness duck shooting in 1990 in WA and the recent non-protection of a range of birds (WABN No 53 March 1990) and only as valuable as enforcement can make them. Duck shooting is a notable example of enforcement difficulties, for ducks are shot out of allowed hours, shot on areas closed to shooting and ducks, not on the shooting schedule, are killed. (Not to mention the litter, disturbance and fires lit in times of total fireban).

Ethical considerations are often difficult to have accepted and are notoriously unpopular, economic and other arguments being much preferred.

Is the destruction of a cuckoo to save two honeyeaters ethically correct? The situation is analogous to an obstetrical decision on whether to save foetus/child or mother, an area in which the wilful destruction of either may be illegal but in which the saving of one at the expense of the other usually seen as ethical and acceptable. If the destruction of the cuckoo is "illegal", but "ethical", which

consideration should be given precedence? Presumably the RAOU (on duck policy lines) would call for an Australia-wide study of the timing, duration, distribution and success of cuckoo breeding events, among other requirements before a decision. But does this resolve the dilemma or merely delay the moment of difficult decision. Is the destruction of a cuckoo (or shooting of a duck) more or less moral if there are many or few cuckoos or ducks? Economic considerations probably do not apply to cuckoos or even duck shooting, but are central to habitat degradation and destruction and their side-effects. The current debate on sustainable agriculture and economic development is some effort to reconcile the economic conflicts involved, as well as the ethical and scientific. The RAOU (WA) opposition to the Mt Lesueur development is based on objection to the loss of bird habitat, and the potential endangerment of at least one species (Carnaby's Cockatoo).

In summary, there seems little consistency of approach to egg taking, cuckoo removing, duck shooting and habitat destruction. The reconciliation of differing approaches is not easy (and may not be finally possible) but it is an area to which all birdwatchers might usefully give thought and attention.

B. Buchanan

THE MALLEE MOUNDS AT EYRE - JULY 1990

In July, 12 intrepid birds/bushmen travelled to Eyre to take part in the second Mallee Fowl Mound Search under the directions of Rod Smith. We all assembled at Cocklebidy and then the Toyota and three white Subarus set off in procession, with another Subaru waiting at the Lookout. The casual day visitors, of whom we had several during the week, must have thought that the Observatory had taken out the agency for Subaru, as they quite filled the parking area.

After a brief introduction to the art of measuring our paces to ascertain how many per 100 metres, a short lesson in elementary navigation and a few practise blows on the whistles we were to carry in case the navigation wasn't all that good, we plunged off into the bush in twos or threes in what we believed were straight lines 100m apart, to make 1000m transects into the scrub. The navigator pushed bravely on, keeping to a compass bearing, pushing through prickles, skirting impassable bush with six steps sideways, six steps back, stooping low under drooping mallee branches, up and down sandhills, (fortunately always in delightful weather) while the other members of the group acted as outriders, searching the bush in either side for mallee fowl mounds, active or otherwise.

Some likened the navigation to an intricate dance pattern - side, side, together, quick, quick, slow, turn around and take a back bearing! All the time we were counting off the paces and every 100m tying a knot in our piece of string, and starting again, until ten knots told us we had travelled one kilometre. Then we did a right angle turn, advanced 50 metres, turned again and set course to return to the road from which we had started. Any mounds found were recorded by distance from the road and distance off the transect line.

The miracle was that we mostly came out where we should have, and that we could find the point from which a straight line should take us directly to the Malleefowl mound, and that we could even re-locate the areas where the mounds lay in that thick and tangled bush.

The search was deemed successful, as we recorded a further 21 mounds on top of last year's 20, though only a couple of these were active. Perhaps we were too early, as two showed signs of some renewed activity on that very day, but we were also most concerned to discover one freshly dug out by dogs, of which there are a number roaming wild, together with foxes and feral cats. We also saw Malleefowl, at a couple of locations, one only about 500m from the house and numerous tracks were found.

The "on the side" birding was also very rewarding, especially on the afternoon excursion to Arabiddy station, to see the Blue

Bonnets, woodswallows, lapwings, Brown Songlark, Rufous Whistler and a large number of Wedge-tailed Eagle were just some of the sightings.

The Observatory itself still provides the easiest and most exciting birding, and the Pink Cockatoos remain the star attractions, though Blue-breasted Fairy-wren, Southern Scrub-robin, Golden Whistler, Rock Parrot, Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Chestnut Quail-thrush also provided great interest. On the day the main party went seabird and seal watching, one observer in about four hours counted over 250 birds at the water baths outside the windows.

A great time was had by all and our thanks to Gwen and Graeme Goodreid for their excellent attention and assistance and to course organiser Rod Smith.

P.S. Eyre has something for everyone. Have you been there yet?

C. Mercer

LITTLE EGRET FEEDING BEHAVIOUR

Whilst watching waders feeding on the vast expanse of weed and sand uncovered by the receding tide in Roebuck Bay, we have, during four separate weeks since May 1988, noted that behind every Sacred Ibis feeding along the tide way there was always a Little Egret. It has appeared as though the Sacred Ibis create a feeding pattern for the Little Egret. This behaviour was not seen elsewhere - for instance during a campout at Cape Keraudren where both species were present.

B. Barrett

ELEGANT PARROT SIGHTED NEAR KALBARRI

We are pleased to have received a Bird Observers Club of Australia Unusual Sighting Record from the files of Stephen Debus, Editor, The Australian Bird Watcher.

While the record is dated August 1987, it is of importance as Elegant Parrot were not reported from the 1 degree block in The Atlas of Australian Birds, Blakers M, Davies SJJF, Reilly P N (1984) RAOU, Melbourne University Press.

The Observer, Rex Buckingham, saw four Elegant Parrot near a rainwater pool in a sandpit close to Kalbarri airport, some twelve metres from his 'hide', a motor vehicle. Checking with local birdwatchers revealed that Elegant Parrot had been reported in the Kalbarri area previously by less experienced observers and had on each occasion been attributed as the frequently sighted Rock Parrot.

Editor

RED-BACKED KINGFISHER

On Friday 27th July, I observed a bird at the corner of Wellesley and Marriot Roads, near Brunswick Junction, which appeared to be a pale kingfisher, sitting on telegraph wires.

Upon closer inspection the bird was identified as a Red-backed Kingfisher. The striated head and white underparts differentiated it from a Sacred Kingfisher. The bird seemed wet and was perching with its wings slightly drooped, exposing the rump and lower back with a distinctive rufous colour.

I observed the bird for about five minutes, before driving off (to carry on my Scopewest count). The kingfisher remained where it was.

Simpson and Day (1986) state "an arid inland species which moves to the coast in dry years" and Cayley (1987) agrees with this. The Atlas of Australian Birds (Blakers et al 1984) shows no record of the bird in the lower south-west of Australia.

The recent severed winds experienced in W.A. may possibly have driven or blown the Red-backed Kingfisher from its normal habitat.

J.G. Little

PROJECTS

RAPTOR FEEDING

We wish to feature brief reports of observations by readers.

For the December 1990 issue the subject is RAPTOR FEEDING. Please send in brief details of your experiences of this (in 1990), using the following as a guide:

1. Species of raptor
2. If live prey: what was the prey?
how was it captured?
where was it eaten?
3. If not live prey, what was the food?
4. Were other raptors involved?
5. What was the locality and environment?
6. When did it occur? (month/time of day)

Readers may 'phone their contributions to the office (364 6202) or submit them in writing prior to October 20th.

R. Smith

AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE AND AUSTRALIAN RAVEN - SURVEY PROJECT

Following recent correspondence concerning possible changes of abundance in Australian Magpie in the South-west, Mark Whackett is undertaking a longitudinal (possibly five year) survey of the abundance of Australian Magpie and Australian Raven in the suburbs of Perth.

This is a survey to which all Perth based birdwatchers can make a contribution without the need of much, if any travel costs and you are asked and encouraged to take part.

Survey sheets and further information can be obtained from Mark Whackett, 12/16 Hensman Street, South Perth, 6151 or telephone 367-9189.

SACRED KINGFISHERS OVERWINTERING IN THE SOUTH-WEST; A REQUEST FOR RECORDS

The Sacred Kingfisher is regarded as a summer migrant in the south-west of Australia, arriving in early September and departing by early March or the first week of April at the latest (Serventy and Whittell 1976). Sacred Kingfishers are known to over-winter in the south-west however, (Serventy and De Reberia 1985). It is not unexpected, therefore, to record the occasional over-wintering Sacred Kingfisher in the south-west. The locations of observations I have made, however, are interesting.

On 23 March 1988, a pair of Sacred Kingfishers was observed at Point Duoro (33 19' S, 115 40' E) on Leschenault Inlet. Initially thought to be late in departing for northern climes, at least one Sacred Kingfisher was still present on 11 May 1988. On 1 June 1989, a single adult male was seen 0.5 km south of The Chimneys on Peel Inlet (32 33' S, 115 42' E), while on 20 July 1990, a single bird was found amongst paperbark trees at the southern end of Lake Joondalup (31 46' S, 115 47' E). All of these Sacred Kingfishers were in vegetation close to water, whereas in summer the species is commonly encountered in open forests and woodlands often many kilometres from the nearest wetland.

Pizzey (1980) suggests that rare over-wintering Sacred Kingfishers in southern Australia occur in regions of locally mild climates. This has been the explanation of the resident status of the species on Rottnest Island, where the climate is ameliorated by the surrounding ocean (Saunders and de Reberia 1985). The mainland sites on the Leschenault and Peel Inlets, and at Lake Joondalup, do not appear to have this characteristic.

Possibly, over-wintering Sacred Kingfishers are associated not simply with locally mild climates, but with environments which can provide them with a reliable food supply during winter. The

sorts of prey eaten by Sacred Kingfishers (large invertebrates and small vertebrates) are scarce in the forests and woodlands of the south-west in winter but are abundant around wetlands at this time. Rottnest Island, with a locally mild climate, wetlands and a rocky marine shoreline providing sheltered bays rich in marine invertebrates, may be the ideal sort for over-wintering Sacred Kingfishers.

To see if over-wintering Sacred Kingfishers are closely associated with wetlands in the south-west, I would be greatly interested in other winter records of Sacred Kingfishers (April to August inclusive).

M.J. Bamford

References:

- Pizzey, G. & Doyle, R. (1980), *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins, Sydney.
- Saunders, D.A. and de Reberia, C.P. (1985), *The Birdlife of Rottnest Island*, Saunders and de Reberia, Guildford, Western Australia.
- Serventy, D.L. and Whittell, H.M. (1976), *Birds of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth.

BBC BQ

Some easy questions for readers of a well-known ornithological publication:

1. Has Asian Dowitcher been seen in the South-west of WA? If so, where?
2. Banded Stilt bred at Lake King in 1988. When was the previous recorded breeding at Lake King?
3. Has Oriental Cuckoo ever been recorded south of the Great Sandy Desert?
4. Which duck first for Australia was recorded in South-west WA in 1986?
5. In 1986 a first sighting of a swallow species for the South-west was made at Thompsons Lake. What species?
6. Where have Royal Spoonbills been observed breeding in South-west WA?
7. Where was the most northerly reported sighting of a Double-banded Plover in WA?
8. When were Garganey last reported from the Kimberley?
9. The first known record of Royal Penguin in WA was at ___?
10. Where has Tawny-crowned Honeyeater been seen in Perth?

MEETING REPORTS

ALBANY - 2nd June

The monthly meeting for May was delayed till Saturday 2nd June to take advantage of the long weekend and was held in the CWA Hall in Albany, attended by some 50 members and birdwatchers from the district and Perth. The object of holding the meeting in Albany rather than in Perth was partly to emphasise that the WA Group consists of more than just Perth and partly to take the chance of seeing birds confined largely to the Albany district.

At the meeting, Alan Danks (Manager at the Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve) gave a talk, illustrated by slides, on the project for relocating some Noisy Scrub Birds from the centre of the reserve to more outlying parts, so as to lessen the risk of their being wiped out by some untoward event (e.g. fire) if they continue to be concentrated in one area. Since the bird lays only one egg a year, reproduction is slow; relocation is a necessary precaution against disaster for a species that occurs only in this area.

This talk was followed by another illustrated talk given by Allan

Burbidge (of Woodvale Wildlife Centre, CALM) on the Ground Parrot that has also been reported in the area, but is less easy to find and to preserve. The problems in conserving this species appear altogether more formidable than with the Noisy Scrub Bird.

To coincide with the meeting, a campout and several excursions were arranged during the weekend. On Saturday afternoon Ray Garstone led an enthusiastic group of over 50 to Gull Rock and surrounding bushland. Everyone had very good views of Rock Parrot here feeding and roosting in the coastal vegetation. There were also reports of Elegant Parrot, Red-eared Firetail and Brown Goshawk during the afternoon. Some in the party stopped at the Kalgan River crossing on the way back to camp to watch two Osprey, one near a disused nest and the other flying upstream.

On the following day, Sunday 3rd June, about 40 members and others met at the Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve on a cold morning which fortunately cheered up as the day progressed. Divided into four groups, the parties followed up the loud calls of male Noisy Scrub Birds claiming territory and did their best to see them. Some members got fleeting glimpses, but for most it was a case of hoping for a luckier day. Other birds were fairly plentiful, including Tawny-crowned Honeyeater, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Western Bristlebird, Southern Emu-wren and even Western Whipbird (which does not make a noise like a whip cracking, unlike the Eastern Whipbird). There were fine views of Little Eagle and Square-tailed Kite. Lunch by the sea showed up Sooty Oystercatchers.

On Monday morning some members took a seabird trip (see separate report by Allan Burbidge).

More than 100 species of birds were seen in Albany overall. It was a memorable and successful weekend that paves the way for a similar distant meeting and excursions elsewhere in WA in the future.

Members will have the opportunity to join a campout to Albany following the RAOU Congress in Perth in September 1991. Mark your diaries now - 22nd to 27th September 1991 - and join in the activities in Albany, a rich birdwatching district with diverse bird habitat.

B. Wilson

ALBANY SEABIRD TRIP - 4th June

The 14 members who joined skipper Fred Bairstow, his wife Mavis and crew member Colin aboard the 'Avon', were treated to some excellent views of several common local seabirds. Soon after leaving the jetty we saw our first Great Skua - the harbour at Albany is one of only two places in Australia where Great Skuas are commonly seen within a harbour. Further out, we saw more, with up to eight being near the boat at any one time, and a number came and settled on the water close to the boat.

There were, of course, the usual gulls, terns and gannets, but the sightings of most interest were the albatrosses. Up to 18 Yellow-nosed Albatrosses could be seen at once, with most of these being very close to the boat. All were adults. Some people got a distant view of an adult Black-browed Albatross.

After a cup of tea on board, we entered nearby Oyster Harbour and circumnavigated Green Island. This island supports a Pelican Colony which was active at the time. Apart from Silver Gulls and three species of cormorant, there was a flock of about 100 Great Knot on the island. Nearby we saw a Pacific Gull and a Kelp Gull, standing next to each other and providing a useful comparison.

A. Burbidge

EXCURSION REPORTS

YELLAGONGA REGIONAL PARK SURVEY NO 1 - LAKE GOOLELLAL - 3rd June

A group of about a dozen birders waited at the edge of Lake

Goolellal at 8.30 on Sunday 3rd June for our "Leader" to appear. Unfortunately Ron Van Delft was unable to come and the replacement was struck by the 'flu' that particular morning. Clive Napier took on the role of leader, but it was a case of the blind leading the blind, as Clive had not been to the Lake before. We could see Musk Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Grebe, Great Egret, a Marsh Harrier and many other water and bush birds from the south-western edge of the Lake.

As thick undergrowth prevented easy further movement, we drove around to the Eastern side of the Lake. Here viewing was much better and access easier. We saw Straw-necked Ibis, White-faced Heron, Great Crested Grebe, Australian Shelduck, Maned Duck and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Clamorous Reed Warblers were singing in the reeds and we saw a Little Eagle and an Australian Kestrel overhead.

There is very good cover for waterbirds on the lake but in some places access is restricted due to private ownership of the lakeside land. Forty two species were recorded in an enjoyable morning's birding.

W. Napier

BICKLEY BROOK RESERVOIR - 17th June

Bickley Brook Reservoir lies in a steep sided valley only 23 kilometres from Perth GPO, and yet the area contains some delightful countryside that is relatively unspoiled and offers a good variety of terrain for the birdwatcher.

About 30 of us met on a bright cold morning with Rod Smith as our leader and set out to explore the stream and the steeper north side of the valley. The bird population was not as active as we were and we had to work for our sightings, but by lunchtime we had a count of 35 species. There were Splendid Fairy-wrens in abundance and most people had a good view of the males in full colour. Other rewarding sightings were Red-winged Fairy-wrens and both Fan-tailed Cuckoo and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo.

During our lunch break, a Spotted Pardalote took centre stage to give us an explicit demonstration of its recognition features. Shortly afterwards we put up a large Red Kangaroo about 200 metres from where our cars were parked which shows, I think, that the countryside here has not been too tamed as yet.

I enjoyed our outing immensely but you can't do justice to this area in just a few hours and we were unable to explore the southern slopes in our short time there. A highly recommended location. Thank you Rod. One word of caution, the reservoir is being enlarged so there will be a great racket from earthmoving equipment during the working week. Make your visits during the weekend for some time to come.

P. Anson

SERPENTINE NATIONAL PARK - 1st July

The 30 or so people who attended this excursion were treated to some excellent weather and went to parts of the Park which are not often visited by birdwatchers.

About 30 species of birds were seen at the first stop which was in attractive woodland at the base of the scarp, off Chatfield Road. Birds seen here included Australian Shelduck and Maned Duck prospecting for hollows, three species of cuckoo and six species of honeyeater.

The second stop, in jarrah and dryandra, was poor in birds, with few seen of each species, apart from Western Spinebill which were abundant and feeding at flowers of the dryandra.

The final stop was made at the Pipehead Dam, where the most interesting birds included the Red-eared Firetail and White-breasted Robin.

A total of 37 species was recorded in the Park. This included two species not on the list held by CALM. Thanks must go to David Lamont, the National Park Ranger, for assistance with this excursion.

A. Burbidge

COMING EVENTS

EXCURSIONS PROGRAMME

Sunday 2nd September

Full day excursion - Boyagin Rock

This wheatbelt nature reserve has been visited by the RAOU over a number of years and continues to be a favourite site for excursions. Many interesting bird sightings have been recorded and plants of the area are of interest during periods when birds are few.

The excursion departs at 7.15 SHARP from the southern junction of Canning Road and Brookton Highway at Karragullen.

Leader: Ian Standing

Sunday 9th September

Half day excursion - Yellagonga Regional Park Final Survey

Yellagonga Regional Park is the new name for the chain of lakes from Lake Goollalal to Lake Joondalup. Bird lists from these surveys will be sent to the Department of Planning and Urban Development to assist them in preparing a draft management plan for the park.

Meet at 8.30am on the section of Bindaree Terrace nearest Lake Goollalal.

Leader: To be arranged

Campout 15th and 16th September

Eneabba Lakes

In 1987 the RAOU held an excursion to Eneabba which by the account in WA Bird Notes was quite a success. Peter Mack, the leader of the 1987 excursion reports that new birdwatching sites have been found in the district since the 1987 excursion and he is keen to show these to RAOU members.

Permission to camp at Lake Indoon has been obtained, and there is an amenities block at the camp site. To get to Lake Indoon travel along the Brand Highway to the turn-off to Leeman which is about 2km south of Eneabba. Lake Indoon is about 11km from the Brand Highway and is clearly signposted.

Meet on Friday night or Saturday at 10.30 at Lake Indoon.

Leader: Peter Mack (Telephone 099 381 861)

Saturday 22nd September

Half day excursion - Chandala Lake

This excursion is for hardy birdwatchers only, who do not complain to anyone but themselves when wading waist deep in cold water to see breeding birds only to find all the birds have gone!

Chandala Lake is in the Gingin region and in some years is a breeding area for Straw-necked Ibis, herons, cormorants and Rufous Night-herons. This makes it a very significant lake in a regional context; there are few lakes that are known to have breeding Straw-necked Ibis near Perth.

It is necessary to wade into the water to get reasonable views of birds, so please come prepared with waders and/or a change of clothes.

Sections of the road in may be impassible to two wheel drive vehicles, so some sharing of vehicles may need to take place.

Meet at the Muchea Store on the first bend of the Brand Highway at 8.00am.

Leader: George Agar

Monday 24th September

Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

To be arranged

Long weekend campout: 29th September to 1st October (& school holidays by arrangement)

Campout - Artificial Wetland Project, Capel

The RAOU has a contract with AMC Mineral Sands Ltd to develop an artificial wetland from a former mining area specifically as habitat for birds. This project involves many facets, including designing the shape and depth of the wetland, planting suitable vegetation and monitoring the success of the wetland as bird habitat. Frank Doyle is employed by the RAOU full time for this project.

This excursion is likely to include an ibis search, which involves spreading people around the farms of the Capel area early in the morning and having them record when and where ibis from McCarleys swamp feed. This requires lots of people with vehicles.

Some planting activities may also take place.

Frank Doyle can be contacted on 097 272675 (after hours) to discuss the meeting place and time.

Leader: Frank Doyle

Sunday 7th October

Half day excursion - Lake Claremont

Philip Gabriel studied this lake intensively for a period of about 12 months and recently presented a talk to an RAOU meeting about his work. Non-RAOU members will be invited to this excursion so they can gain some insight into the world of birds, and hopefully seriously consider joining the RAOU.

Meet at the south end of Strickland Street at 1.30pm.

Leader: Philip Gabriel

Saturday 13th October

Half day excursion - Woodman Point

Woodman Point is a unique birdwatching site where you can see Ruddy Turnstones feeding on the seaweed and walk 50 metres and see Splendid Fairy-wrens in the bushes nearby. Whilst no guarantees can be offered regarding the above birds, this excursion will visit both the beach and the former quarantine station, which has good stands of original vegetation on it.

Meet at 8 am at the turnoff to Woodman Point (and the Cockburn Power Boat Club) from Cockburn Road.

Leader: Barbara Hale

Saturday 20th October

Half day excursion - Wellard Wetlands

The Wellard Wetlands are artificial wetlands that were once clay pits. About 10 years ago, RAOU members sank knee deep in clay to plant paperbarks around one of the wetlands to enhance their value to birdlife. The excursion leader, Ben Carr is currently studying these wetlands.

Other wetlands in the area will also be visited. Meet at 8.30 am at the corner of Zig Zag Road and St Albans Road.

Leader: Ben Carr

22nd to 26th October - Bird Week

Monday 22nd October

Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

Discussion and review of SCOPEWEST Project and Annual Waterfowl Count, previously advertised for March meeting.

Speakers: Dr. Stuart Halse of C.A.L.M. and Rodney Vervest, R.A.O.U. Research Officer.

Campout 3rd & 4th November

Woodanilling

Our campouts here have been popular and have provided people with many happy birding memories. Ray Garstone with assistance from Wayne Zadow will help us with their local knowledge and skills. Camp will be at the Woodanilling Caravan Park where there are good ablution blocks - hot showers, power points. There are barbeques available. Bring tents etc for self sufficient camping.

Meet at 8am and again at noon on Saturday.

Leader: Ray Garstone

Saturday 10th November

Half day excursion - Ashfield Flats

The Bassendean Preservation Group, a local residents group has recently decided to seek official conservation status for a portion of the Ashfield Flats which has saltmarsh, *Melaleuca hamulosa* and Bullrush vegetation. This area is also good for birdwatching as it abuts the river and is adjacent to a large grassland area where small birds of prey are often seen.

Meet at the corner of Best Way and Elder Street, Bassendean at 8 am.

Leader: Ron Van Delft

17th to 25th November - Annual Waterfowl Count

Sunday 18th November

Half day excursion - Beellar Wetlands

The Beellar Wetlands is the chain of lakes which run from North Lake to Thomsons Lake. The last excursion here was particularly successful because we were able to see many wetlands, each with different habitats and birds, in a short space of time. This excursion will concentrate on North Lake, Horse Paddock Swamp, Roe Swamp and Bibra Lake at the top of the Beellar Chain.

Meet at 8.30 am at 'Pioneers Park' on Bibra Road of Progress Drive. Bibra Road is not made but is just a small car park about 200 metres south of the intersection of Hope Road and Progress Drive.

Leader: Norm Godfrey

Saturday and/or Sunday 24th & 25th November

Day excursion/campout - Lake Mealup

The Lake Mealup Preservation Society invites RAOU members to visit Lake Mealup, either for a day or for the weekend to birdwatch at the lake and in the Mandurah district generally. Lake Mealup is recognised as an area of particular value to birds, as is the nearby Peel-Harvey Estuary.

A canoe based survey of part of Lake Mealup is planned for some time during the weekend, so birdwatchers with canoes are invited to contact the organiser in this regard.

As the route to Lake Mealup is quite complex, members should meet at the corner of the South West Highway and Greenlands Road (which is not far from the Pinjarra Racecourse) at 9.30 am on Saturday morning. If you wish to join the excursion on Sunday or intend to stay overnight please make a note to contact Peter Wilnot on 339 4142 (h) during the week before the excursion.

Leader: Peter Wilnot

Monday 26th November

Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm
Travellers' Tales

Sunday 2nd December

Half day excursion - Flynn Road

This site has been observed regularly during the last few years and has proven to be an excellent area for birds. Amongst the bird life seen at this site are Crested Shrike-tit, four species of robin, five of parrot and eight of raptors.

Meet at 7.15 am at the corner of Flynn Road and Great Eastern Highway, which is about one kilometre back towards Perth from 'the Lakes' turnoff (i.e. the turnoff to York).

Leader: Bryan Barrett

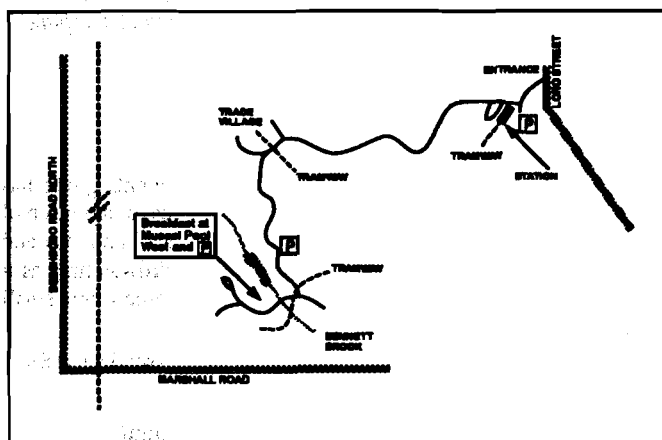
Sunday 9th December

Christmas breakfast - Whiteman Park

Following the success of the Kings Park Breakfast held in February this year, it has been decided to hold a similar event for Christmas.

Please contact the RAOU office by 5th December if you wish to have a catered breakfast. This will cost \$6.00 per person (children \$3.00). In order to minimise the use of throw-away cups and plates, please bring your own mug and plate. Washing up facilities will be provided.

Meet at 7.30 am at the carpark indicated on the map below.



1990 ALL-PURPOSE BIRD CARDS

The 1990 all-purpose bird card sets are now on sale at Canning Bridge office.

We are indebted to artist and member Bryony Fremlin for donating the paintings for this year's excellent set and to member Michael Bamford for preparing the texts.

A packet of eight lovely cards costs \$6, a bargain price.

This year we will not be invited to have a stall at King's Park Wildflower Exhibition and we must find other avenues for the sale of the cards to raise funds.

Can you help by taking some packs and selling them to your friends? Packs will be available at general meetings and from the RAOU office.

If able to help, please forward by telephone or letter, your name, address and the number of packs required. Your help will be appreciated.



NEW ZEALAND BOTANICAL TOUR

26 NOVEMBER - 19 DECEMBER 1990

COATE'S WILDLIFE TOURS of Perth are pleased to announce the addition of a 24-day New Zealand Botanical Tour to their popular programme of wildlife tours.

This new tour is a fascinating introduction to the alpine flora and vegetation of both the North and South Islands. The tour begins in Christchurch with 14 days in the South Island before flying to Rotorua to travel the North Island finishing in Auckland.

The tour will be expertly escorted by local New Zealand guide, Simon Heppelthwaite, a field botanist with extensive local knowledge.

Inclusive cost from Perth is \$4449, with lower prices available from other Capital Cities.

Further information and brochures are available from:

87 First Avenue

Mount Lawley

Western Australia 6050

Tel: (09) 271 7879

Fax: (09) 271 5570

1. Yes. Albany, July 1989 (WABN No 51 Sept 89)
2. 1930 (WABN No 48 Nov 88)
3. Yes. January 1988, Dampier (WABN No 47 Sept 88)
4. Northern Pinal, Chandala, July 1986 (WABN No 39 Sept 86)
5. Barn Swallow, January 1986 (WABN No 37 Mar 86)
6. In Mandurah, December 1984 (WABN No 36 Dec 85)
7. Guraga Lake, Dandaragan Shire, July 1987 (WABN No 43 Sept 87)
8. December 1988 (WABN No 50 June 89)
9. Augusta, March 1987 (WABN No 42 June 87)
10. Kings Park, February 1988 (WABN No 46 June 88)

BIRDBO - ANSWERS