

Western Australian Bird Notes

Number 8. November 1978

Meetings

Tom Spence has once again generously offered to host our Annual Meeting in the form of his now famous outdoor banquet at the Zoo. Tom's house is at 151 Mill Point Road, South Perth. The time: Friday, 5th January, 1979 - arrive between 7.00 and 7.30 p.m.

IF YOU INTEND TO ATTEND YOU MUST LET TOM KNOW BEFORE 28TH DECEMBER BY LEAVING A MESSAGE AT HIS OFFICE, PHONE 367-7988.

Catering for sixty people is no picnic. If you could lend a hand please let Tom know. Stephen Davies hopes to fill the top hat this year so please come prepared.

1979 Congress and Field Outing

Congress will be held on Saturday 25th and Sunday 26th August at the School of Mines, Kalgoorlie. The theme of papers to be presented will be "Arid Zone Birds" and intending speakers should send their title and/or abstract to Stephen Davies, Waters Upton, Mt. Helena, W.A. 6555. Further details of accommodation and booking procedure will be published in the March Newsletter. If you intend to bring a four wheel drive vehicle on the Field Outing along the Transcontinental Railway to Ceduna, would you please let Stephen Davies know.

Eyre Bird Observatory

The response to our request for books in the last newsletter was good. Thank you.

Another item needed at Eyre is floorcoverings. Your unwanted rugs or honan squares will be most welcome. Offers once again to Stephen Davies, Waters Upton, Mt. Helena, 6555.

Atlas Outing to Paynes Find - October 8th-9th

Results of the 24 hour Atlas tally hunt held on the long weekend were:-

1st: Noela Marr and Bill Cohen - 30 species (6 confirmed breeding).

2nd: Dom Serventy and Peter Curry - 31 species (4 confirmed breeding).

Noteworthy observations on this trip included Mallee Fowl, Chiming Wedgebill, Gilbert's Whistler feeding young and a tentative identification of a Grey-headed Honeyeater on the Warne River which is a long way south of the known range of this arid zone species.

Ground Cuckoo-shrikes in the south-west

Several recent observations of this species near the coast where many observers may be unfamiliar with it prompt me to suggest that the simplest observations of behaviour are often omitted from URRF forms. In this case the fact that the bird walks (and doesn't hop) when on the ground quite clearly distinguishes it from the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

Identifying by call

Nearly all of us become familiar with a certain number of bird calls which we unquestionably attribute to the appropriate birds when in the field. This brings to mind the atlassing axiom that "seeing is believing" because in some cases sound records can be deceiving.

Take the chap from Victoria who dropped in recently and said in passing that he had made a recording of a Little Grassbird from Carnarvon, in mangroves. I thought the habitat a bit odd but Little Grassbirds can be in all sorts of odd spots so I accepted it. Then we got talking about Mangrove Robins and he played me a recording he had made recently in Queensland. I said it would be interesting to compare the calls of Mangrove Robins from opposite sides of the continent and played him a recording I had made near Roebourne. "But surely", he said, "that's a Little Grassbird on the tape". Not so. I had actually used the recording to replay to Mangrove Robins whilst photographing them. There is indeed a similarity to the plaintive whistle of the Grassbird and then, of course, we realised that the bird he had recorded at Carnarvon in mangroves was in fact a Mangrove Robin. Even though this is a southern extension of range (which needs substantiation) it is much more believable. And so his conception of a Mangrove Robin's call from the east, led him astray in W.A.

There are, of course, some cases where a knowledge of the calls is necessary to identify the species. Take Crows and Ravens for instance. Their calls are the best diagnostic field character and were we not to accept this then most field records would become *Corvus sp.*

I have often been asked about learning bird calls and the only advice I can give is whenever you hear a call you don't recognise, track it down. Keep this up and you'll soon remember.

A note on identifying beach-drifted Petrels

Several of our Atlassers have had difficulty in adequately describing Petrel remains found on our beaches. There are two main groups of Petrels which observers may come across and it would be helpful if the reporter could state whether they had the thin slender bill of a Shearwater (genus *Puffinus*) or the shorter, more robust bill of the Petrel (genus *Pterodroma*) - see illustrations on pages 92 and 98 of the last edition of the Birds of Western Australia.

Colours of legs are also important for identification, whether the legs are blue, as in the Little Shearwater, flesh coloured, parti-coloured, black or blackish-grey tinged with purple. The highly characteristic Prions can be recognised by their blue feet and dove-grey dorsal plumage and black-tipped tails. The Blue Petrel is often confused with the Prions but has a white-tipped tail - the only known Petrel which has this feature.

Editor: Graeme Chapman

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