



Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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RAOU ACTIVITIES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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BITTERN THREE TIMES IN ONE YEAR!

An unidentified bird flew off, late in the afternoon of April the 13th as I was taking two bird-watchers from ORNITHOLIDAY for a walk down the Murray River (in the Darling Range); we were not far from our camp-site at the time. After flushing the bird out a second and then third time I was able to get a good view and positively identify it as a Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*).

It is interesting to note that a Black Bittern was observed in the same location approximately twelve months earlier by some members of the K.R.M. Branch of the W.A. Naturalist Club.

The bird was found again on the morning of the 14th of April in the same location. Although the bittern mostly stayed close to the river while under observation, it ventured once up into the Flooded Gum (*Eucalyptus rudis*) and Jarrah (*E. marginata*) and into the understorey of *Melaleuca* and *Bossiaea*. We flushed the bird back down to the river where everyone got a good view for ten minutes as it sat on a large Flooded Gum which was leaning over the river.

It is generally accepted that the Black Bittern is found only in the above habitat, alongside larger rivers, but there is a resident Black Bittern on the Goodale Sanctuary south of Pinjarra. This bird sits among *Melaleuca raphiophylla* trees which surround a swamp with no flowing water nearby.

Bob Goodale, April 1983



The tiny Baillon's (Marsh) Crake has only been recorded from November to January in the Waterbird Project and is suspected of migrating to northern Australia or beyond. This same species crosses the Sahara Desert each year! Note its long toes which enable it to walk on floating water-weed. 1

COMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in Cygnet Hall, on the waterfront at the corner of Hackett Drive and Mounts Bay Road, Crawley, commencing at 8.00 p.m. There is ample parking adjacent to the hall and visitors are always welcome.

Monday, June 27. Members' Night. Peter Curry will present a short summary of his work in analysing Dr. Dom Servanty's Bass Strait Mutton-bird data; other speakers will give short illustrated reports on RAOU and private bird-study projects being conducted in the South-West. Members should also bring items of interest to present: the Chairman will make a list of those who wish to speak and will call for as many speakers as time permits.

In response to the tremendous growth in RAOU membership at present (over 60 new members since Christmas), we are holding extra meetings whenever guest speakers are available.

Monday, September 5. Special Meeting No. 1. Graeme Chapman will speak on "Photographing Australian Birds". All who saw Graeme's excellent exhibition will be keen to learn about the art of stalking birds in order to obtain candid photographs of the highest quality.

Monday, September 26. Jim Lane — "Duck Hunting in Australia". This will be our usual (tremendous) September meeting. Jim is a research officer at the W.A. Wildlife Research Centre of the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife and his responsibilities are with waterbird management, particularly regulation of the game duck harvest. We will be shown why W.A. leads the way in the area of duck hunting management in Australia.

At forthcoming meetings, we will be asking if all people attending could consider making a donation, regardless of whether tea is taken or not. Donations are needed as we are now being charged for use of the hall and facilities.

Volunteers will also be asked for, from one quarter of the alphabet, to assist with preparation of tea and biscuits (men are not exempted!).

COMING EXCURSIONS & CAMPOUTS

In order to attract and retain members, we are embarking on a programme of **monthly local excursions**. New members and visitors are especially welcome: members could bring friends along to show them one type of activity that the RAOU can offer.

These excursions will generally be less than a full day's length and will be led by a variety of experienced birdos. Unless otherwise specified, **the meeting place** for each outing will be in **Kings Park**: take the first left-hand turn at the roundabout just past the restaurant, into the no-through road and gather at the carpark area. The meeting time will be **8.00 a.m.** from October to April and **9.00 a.m.** from May to September, unless otherwise specified (see below).

EXCURSION/CAMPOUT CONTACTS

Roger Jaensch: 364 6202; Steve Keeling: 291 7592 and Joan Seabrook: 299 6816.

Saturday, June 11: Wheatbelt trip. Meet at the Centrepoint carpark, just before the Town Hall in Great Eastern Highway, Midland, at 8.00 a.m. (note the early time). We plan to conduct a similar day-trip to that which was held at this time last year in the Goomalling and Toodyay districts. A good chance to meet country birdos and see inland bushbirds. If the weather looks ominous, ring the Secretary or any other Committee member to check whether the excursion will go ahead.

Northam people should meet the Perth group opposite the Northam Post Office, at 9.15 am. Contact **Lindsay Milhinch** (096) 22 1671 to find out where we are planning to go in case you live closer to the excursion area than to the Northam P.O.

Saturday, June 25: Local excursion. Meet in King's Park at 2.00 p.m. (see above), but check local and State newspapers or ring RAOU Excursion Contacts for more details closer to the date.

Wednesday June 29 to Monday July 11, 1983: Winter Retreat on Rottnest Island. The RAOU has booked a spacious eight-bed chalet ("Cottage G") at Rotto for 13 days, with the aim of offering members an alternative winter birding activity. We plan to conduct seabird watches and take part in the National Winter Wader Count, while studies may also be made of resident colourbanded populations of the Red-capped Robin and Golden Whistler and of Australian Shelduck territories. For further reading on the birding attractions of Rottnest Island see *Birds of Rottnest Island — A Checklist* by P. de Rebeira and D. Saunders (available at UWA Bookshop for \$1).

Participants are welcome at any stage during the retreat period (someone will always be there), but **bookings must be made with Roger Jaensch (364 6202) by Friday June 17.** We also require a deposit to cover accommodation costs whereas food costs can be paid day by day at Rotto. The charges will be:

Friday, Saturday nights — \$4 per head
Other nights — \$1.50 per head
Food charges — \$5 per day

Notes:

- (1) Accommodation deposit may **not** be refundable if replacements cannot be found.
- (2) Food costs are often higher at Rotto than in Perth!
- (3) Family rates may be negotiated.

We have already received early bookings, so don't hesitate to secure your place! With hire of extra beds, the chalet can sleep 12 quite comfortably. Additional accommodation may yet be booked by the RAOU if demand so dictates.

Ferry Information: Rottnest Islander

Cost per head (assuming return trip is not on the same day) — \$15.50 return ex. Fremantle, or \$17.50 ex. Perth. Ferry departs Perth at 0900 (1000 from Freo) and arrives at Rotto at 1100. Ferry leaves Rottnest at 1600, reaching Fremantle at 1700 and Barrack Street Jetties at 1800.

These details are subject to alteration by weather conditions and price rises.

No local excursions are planned for July.

Saturday August, 6: Local Excursion.

Meet in Kings Park at 9.00 a.m. (see above). Venue undecided, but check newspapers or RAOU contacts.

August 20 — 21: Boyagin — Tutanning Weekend.

For our first country venture in the new 'season' we will visit Boyagin and Tutanning Nature Reserves, in the **Pingelly** District. Both reserves have tremendously varied bush-bird habitats which are representative of the transition from jarrah/wandoo woodland eastwards to mallee-heath and salmon gum country.

We will meet on the roadside immediately past the intersection of **Bookton Highway and Canning Road, Karragullen** at **8.30 a.m.** on Saturday August 20. Our first objective will be the Boyagin Nature Reserve (probably Boyagin Rock specifically), which is about 90 odd km distant by way of the Brookton Highway. Local birdos should contact the Pingelly Wildlife Officer (098 87 1273) for details of access to the initial rendezvous point at Boyagin Nature Reserve (10.30am).

After birding at Boyagin, persons keen to stay overnight (and being self-sufficient for **outdoor camping**) will proceed to a nearby farm property. Late-comers wishing to join us overnight should contact R. Jaensch or the Pingelly Fisheries and Wildlife Office for details.

Our meeting place on Sunday will be at the **Pingelly Post Office** and we will leave here for the Tutanning Nature Reserve at **9.30 a.m.**

Saturday August 27: Helena Valley

Local excursion. Meet at 9.00 a.m. at the Centrepoint Carpark, Great Eastern Highway, Midland.

September 6 — 11. Campout near Yallingup: Rufous Bristlebirds (Note the later start due to special RAOU meeting on September 5).

This school holidays venture should interest those who are prepared to spend many hours beating, listening or watching patiently in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste coastal scrubs, for any sign of the Rufous Bristlebird. Previous organised attempts to prove that this secretive ground-bird is not extinct, have not succeeded. However, a number of reports indicate that there is still hope of finding the Rufous Bristlebird alive and well.

Our campsite will be on the Barker property near Yallingup. Campers will need to be entirely self-sufficient, but emergency shelter and bush toilets may be available. Local members and interested persons are particularly welcome.

Directions

Take the Yallingup road from Dunsborough and turn into Old Caves Road just before the Yallingup settlement. Follow the bitumen southward for about 7 km to the Barker property which is on the right hand side of the road. The entrance will be clearly marked with an RAOU sign. If you get to Moses Rock Rd, you have gone too far south.

Saturday September 17: Bickley Brook Reservoir

Meet at the reservoir BBQ area at 9.00 a.m. for a half-day stroll in the flowering Darling scarp heath and wandoo. Bring BBQ lunches.

Saturday September 24: Pelican Point/Alfred Cove

Meet at 2.00 p.m. outside the Pelican Point Reserve, Crawley. If birds are scarce here, we will proceed to Alfred Cove.

Thursday September 29 — Wednesday October 5: Fitzgerald Campout.

The 1983 October Long Weekend campout will be held at the Twertup Field Studies Centre, in the Fitzgerald River National Park. This is a unique wilderness area which, in the vicinity of Twertup is clothed in mallee-heath, interrupted by steep breakaways and yate-lined creeks with deep waterholes.

Our planned activities include searches for the elusive **Ground Parrots and Western Bristlebirds** in an area adjoining the northern boundary of the FRNP. An 'out-camp' may be set up there to facilitate dawn and dusk searches. At the base camp we plan to mist-net and census the more abundant bush-birds and investigate Western Whipbird territories.

Some RAOU people should be at the campsite by early afternoon on the 29th, and members and visitors (particularly from the Ongerup-Ravensthorpe region) are welcome to arrive at any stage. Most participants should **provide their own accommodation** (no caravans), although the spongolite-brick house will accommodate 12 people (book with R. Jaensch) and has some cooking facilities. There are also two toilets and two rainwater tanks and a 240V generator may be connected to the lighting system.

Directions:

From Jerramungup, proceed towards Ravensthorpe on Highway One for 18 km and then turn right, into Quiss Road (where the FRNP meets the highway). Follow Quiss Rd (and the rabbit-proof fence) southward for about 18 km and then travel eastward for 16 km to Twertup house (passing a "crossroad"). The track ends at Twertup after some 34 km (less than one hour) of travelling from the highway.

Access is generally quite reasonable for conventional vehicles, although the presence of as many 4WD vehicles as possible would be a great asset to the campout.

Proposed Woodanilling Campout

Ray Garstone and Wayne Zadow have invited the RAOU to spend a weekend at Woodanilling in late October or early November. We would camp at the oval and would be shown local bird nesting activity by Ray and Wayne. We will confirm details of this in the September Newsletter.

Excursion and Campout venue register

The RAOU Excursion Contacts/Organisers are establishing a register of places visited on excursions and campouts and would like to hear of places that members know of and think

suitable for outings. Information required includes access details, contacts (eg. owners), parking space, types of bird habitat, bird lists or highlights and the best times of year to visit.

MARCH MEETING

More than 100 people attended the R.A.O.U. meeting at Cygnet Hall on 28th March. This increase in attendance largely resulted from our recent newspaper advertisements seeking new members. Dr. Davies welcomed the newcomers at the meeting and outlined the current activities of the W.A. group.

Dr. Ian Rooke gave the address which dealt with his studies in the South-West of Silvereyes and their impact on vineyards. Results of banding showed that in the Margaret River area, birds seldom move more than 20 miles. Food preference trials on caged birds supported field observations that marri nectar is preferred above all other foods and that grapes are low in the order of preference.

The use of "Measuro1" bird repellent on peripheral plantings was effective for young birds but older, more experienced birds soon learned to attack the main crop. Other control methods have been suggested, such as provision of alternative food sources which are higher on the preference order, and also bear at the same time as grapes (eg. figs, *Banksia coccinea*, and deadly nightshade *Solanum* which is one of the preferred species in the coastal study area where the breeding birds are being studied). The only 100% effective method is the use of fine netting rolled out over the trellisses to exclude the birds.

Dr. Rooke hopes to continue the study by discovering more about the factors which control nectar production in the Marri. The lecture concluded with a lively question time.

EXCURSION REPORTS

Wanneroo Excursion — 26 January, 1983.

A group of more than 40 members and newcomers attended an impromptu excursion to Joondalup and Jandabup Lakes on 26/2/83. Most of those present had come in response to advertisements in the Wanneroo and Stirling newspapers. The assemblage was guided by Graeme Chapman and Jim Lane and a good variety of bush and waterbirds was seen.

This was the first event at which the W.A. Group's 1983 membership drive was publicised and several new members were gained on the day.

March 26: Floreat Waters, Herdsman Lake.

A publicity campaign aimed at attracting those members of the public who are unaware of the activities of the RAOU, was launched by inviting 'beginners' to join experienced birds in a sortie to Floreat Waters. Forty-seven people attended the outing and were given a brilliant brief on the background of Herdsman Lake and Floreat Waters by Peter Curry, well known for his booklet "*The Birds of Herdsman Lake*".

Highlights of the afternoon were Whiskered Terns*, Wood Sandpipers, a Spotless Crake and a Great Crested Grebe.

April 6th: Bibra & Yangebup Lakes

The venue for this excursion had not been announced in the March newsletter, so most people met (successfully) in King's Park before moving off to Bibra Lake. Some 42 people, many of whom were newcomers, enjoyed the excellent weather and were led by telescope — clutching birdos Peter Curry, Roger Jaensch, Bruce Buchanan and Steve Keeling.

Observers were treated to close encounters with thousands of waterbirds and regular birdos soon discovered how well they could identify and describe the birds to newcomers! Highlights included rafts of swimming Avocets, formations

of Australasian Shovelers and Pink-eared Ducks filter-feeding, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill, four Black-tailed Godwits and a total of 15 Whistling Kites.

After a brief discourse on binoculars, telescopes, bird books and RAOU member concessions, the group proceeded to the NW side of Yangebup Lake. Here the brave ventured across boggy mud to look closely at Red-necked Stints with reddish necks (partial breeding colours) and Spotless Crakes at the sloppy *Typha* edges, while those on firmer ground saw a small male Brown Goshawk stirring up hordes of Tree Martins.

April 9: Floreat Waters, Herdsman Lake.

As a result of the success of the March 26 outing, it was decided to hold an impromptu outing relying on an announcement at the Cygnet Hall RAOU meeting and a posting in the *West Australian* "What's On" column. Members are advised to watch out for such announcements in the press as conditions are often perfect for outings but there is insufficient time to announce these in *WA Bird Notes*.

A number of members volunteered to lead groups which meant that there were six groups in all, with up to nine in a group. This allowed a far better opportunity for the less experienced members and 32 newcomers alike to ask questions and get a certain amount of attention, which seems difficult when the groups are any larger.

Highlights were the Glossy Ibis*, Yellow-billed Spoonbill*, Marsh Sandpiper, Great Crested Grebe, Greenshank*, Red-necked Stint* and Curlew Sandpiper*.

(* Denotes a first sighting or unusually large number for the area).

Perup Forest Campout: 22-25 April, 1983.

Forty-eight people attended a most enjoyable weekend at the Forests Department's Field Station in the Perup River Fauna Priority Area during the ANZAC long weekend. RAOU and visitor participants came from both city and country and were introduced to a variety of techniques of bird study including mist-netting, foraging observations and censusing.

Saturday was spent searching generally for bush-birds within the partially overgrown farmland (on which the field station stands), and in the adjacent jarrah forest, wandoo woodland and *Melaleuca* swamp. The highlight was the discovery of a Crested Shrike-tit in open jarrah forest. A total of 46 species was recorded during the day despite the generally harsh and dry seasonal conditions and little flowering in the area.

Transect counts were conducted through the farm, jarrah forest and wandoo on Sunday and Monday mornings. They showed the most abundant birds to be the Yellow-plumed Honeyeater and Yellow Robin within the wandoo, and the Western Thornbill, Spotted Pardalote, Silvereye and Yellow and Scarlet Robins within the jarrah forest.

Three mornings' netting at three mist-net sites on the farm yielded 26 captures of 10 species including two family groups of Spendid Fairy-wrens, four Spotted Pardalotes and three recaptures. Scats (droppings used for diet analysis) were collected from the captured birds, while several people carried out foraging observations on the few birds in the area that had not been captured (bird activity was generally quiet in the misty early mornings).

A large fleet set off on Sunday morning for Byenup Lagoon. All arrived for lunch despite a couple of stops for Long-billed Corellas on the way. Twenty species of water-birds were noted including the Great Egret, Darter and Sacred Ibis and a group of Yellow-billed Spoonbills. The fringing yate trees at the Lagoon were found to be rich in bird life with a preponderance of Golden Whistlers and Restless Flycatchers as well as a Fan-tailed Cuckoo, a Sacred Kingfisher and another Crested Shrike-tit. The RAOU excursions seem to be turning up quite a few Shrike-tits, which are fairly elusive birds.

The journey home was interrupted by a demonstration of the Roger Jaensch tossed cowdung technique (patent pending) for locating Spotless Crakes and another of Doug Watkins' impersonations of an Australasian Bittern.

A spotlight survey carried out on Sunday night yielded several Tawny Frogmouths, a few Grey Kangaroos, Brush Wallabies, rabbits and two Brushtail Possums. A King River Eptesicus Bat was captured in a bat trap and to complete the mammalian input, a Chuditch (native cat) was captured in a large Elliot trap. The technique of weighing and measuring the chap without teeth marks being left in the hands was shown.

So, it was a tired and sober (all the port having been consumed on the previous night) bunch of birds which wended its weary way homeward late on Monday morning. The value of these excursions to all was once again proven as many bird tales (and a few unrelated tales) were traded and many friendships were made throughout the weekend. We all learned how much is still to be understood about birds in the South-West.

Grant Wardell-Johnson, Forests Department, Manjimup.

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

The start of the year 1983 saw one new species added to the Eyre Bird list, thanks to Grant Pearson, who preserved one of the Little Shearwaters in spirit (November 5, 1982, Little Shearwater *Puffinus assimilis*: a beach-wrecked specimen from Kanidal Beach).

Some Bird News from our log book for 1983:

- January 31 — Ten species of waders recorded during the beach count: Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers, Banded Lapwing, Hooded, Mongolian and Red-capped Plovers, Greenshank, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling and Banded Stilt. A most unusual variety for January.
- Jan./Feb. — Large numbers of Pink Cockatoo (sometimes over 70), came in to drink at the observatory's water points.
- February 2 — A Galah/Pink Cockatoo pair with two hybrid young visited the north drinking trough. They were seen on a number of other days after this date. The Galah of the pair was seen to feed one of the young.
- February 11-19 — During the weekly transect on 11th February, parties of White-fronted Honeyeaters were observed flying west along a line which passed north of the observatory. This movement was still in progress on the 19th, when they were observed flying over the track between the escarpment and the observatory. They did not stop in our area.
- February 13 — Oriental and Mongolian Plovers recorded on Kanidal Beach during the National Wader count.
- March 7 — The first Double-banded Plover for the season.
- March 28 — Two Australasian Gannets were diving off the weedbeds at 9 Mile. Gannets have been seen a number of times along the beach during April.
- April 28 — Two Rainbow Bee-eaters hawking for insects over the dunes. These are the first Bee-eaters I have seen near the Observatory. They usually come no further than the foot of the escarpment, where a few pairs nested last year. They are late away this year, but this is the first time they have been sighted since February.

Waders.

The number of waders recorded during the beach counts of waders this autumn is much lower than numbers recorded during the last two years. It is however, very like that of

autumn 1980. More Curlew Sandpipers have been recorded this year. The numbers of Red-capped Plovers have also fallen off dramatically over the last two beach counts. On 24th April, only ten were seen, similar to May 1980, which concluded with an average of 7.8 per visit.

Equipment.

The Suzuki motor and generating plant at Eyre are in need of repair. For this to be achieved we require some \$2000 — can anyone assist us in this matter? We are extremely grateful to those people who have already made generous donations towards the upkeep of our important research and educational centre.

Courses:

July 3-9: W.A.I.T. Outside Club. **Birds:** Di and Peter Congreve. An introduction to mist-netting, and elementary field ornithology. To form part of an outing by this club.

July 10-16: **Botany.** Dr. Stephen Hopper. Stephen is an officer of the Wildlife division of the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife. The second course of the series on the web of life around the observatory. For those amateurs who are the backbone of field botany, this will be a wonderful opportunity to visit this interesting area, contribute to the knowledge of its botanic realm and be guided by an expert.

August 27-September 3: **Bird Banding.** Perry de Rebeira and Peter Congreve. This is the fourth banding course at Eyre. It will be a lasting experience and a chance to study birds in the hand. The technique of Mist-netting and handling birds will be the main theme, but the course will be full of laughter and fun. A visit to band birds at Twilight Cove will be included.

September 4-10: **Honeyeaters.** Dr. Brian G. Collins. The course will involve the use of mist-nets and the handling of honeyeaters, and will concern various aspects of nutrition, energetics and pollination biology of these birds.

September 11-17: **Bird's Nests and Territories.** Stephen Ambrose and Peter Congreve. A course aimed at increasing the knowledge of the birds breeding in this area. How and where to look for nests, and the pointers provided by the behaviour of nesting birds. Nest record cards and the mapping of Scrub-wren territories. Expeditions to explore the Burnabie area, and the grasslands of the Hampton tableland will be undertaken. Stephen is studying Scrub-wrens for his Ph.D. thesis and contributed much to the 60 nests found at Eyre in 1982.

October 30-November 5: **Shore Birds.** Jim Lane and Peter Congreve. The beaches at Eyre are a passage stop for migratory waders. Sightings of interesting and rare waders have been made in the area, including the Oriental Plover, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper and the Northern Phalarope. Time will be spent on the identification of the shore birds observed, and on cannon-netting as technique for catching them, so that they may be studied in the hand. Book early for this one!

Eyre Bird Observatory is staffed by a resident Warden and run by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. It lies 1160 km east of Perth on the Great Australian Bight. Access is by road along the Eyre Highway to Cocklebidy. Public transport from Adelaide or Perth is available on Greyhound buses and enquiries may be made through any travel agent.

Each course will be limited to twelve people and will run from Sunday afternoon to the following Saturday morning to allow people to use the weekend to get to and from Cocklebidy. Bookings will be accepted in order of receipt. The inclusive cost of each course will be **\$95.00**. University students should note that some university Guilds or students unions will subsidise students attending these courses.

The above programmes may be subject to amendment and applications for each course should be directed as soon as possible to:

The Warden, Eyre Bird Observatory,
Cocklebidy, Via Norseman, Western Australia 6443.

W.A. ANNUAL BIRD REPORT, 1982 and 1983

Work is now well underway for the 1982 report and I hope that it will be produced in the middle of this year. The Committee decided that we would mail it to all members of the W.A. branch of the R.A.O.U. with a bill **UNLESS we hear to the contrary** that you do not wish us to send it to you. The cost should be in the order of \$3-4. We plan to cover our costs on this but decided against mailing it to everybody to keep the costs down. Could you please **notify us if you do not wish to pay for and receive** the report. As the W.A. branch has no regular income, payment for it is essential.

I would still like to receive records for the **1983 report**. I am still getting queries about what records I require. The aim of the report is to provide an ongoing data bank to which anybody who requires information has access. I can foresee various uses being made of the information. These include:

- 1) Early recognition of changes in distribution and abundance.
- 2) The production of bird lists for specific areas (e.g. reserves or places of interest for Shires and even a formal bird list of W.A. eventually).
- 3) Evidence that people do go out and watch and study birds and use areas that are set aside for reserves.
- 4) Readily available data for people to use in environmental impact statements and submissions to bodies concerned with conservation. Frequently this sort of information is required at short notice, so published information is very helpful. If these observations over a long period of time are easily available, submissions can be better prepared.
- 5) Visitors and people starting up bird watching would have easy access to information as to where to go to see particular birds and what might be expected so they can judge the value and the quality of their own records.

With these points in mind it is easy to see what records are required. The Report should really include everything but neither you nor I could cope with that amount of information. The following ideas may help you decide what to send in. It would be good to be able to have all 300-400 members' names in the list of contributors. Surely you have seen one bird during the year that you consider interesting! **Guidelines for submission of records to W.A. Bird Report** are as follows:

- 1) **New bird** for Australia, the state or area. (This might well rank as a M-F tick or a megatick — See *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book* for explanation!)
- 2) Records that you believe would extend the range of a species.
- 3) Birds that you have not seen in an area before.
- 4) Unusual numbers, unusual behaviour.
- 5) Lists of birds you have seen on outings, at a barbeque, or such like; preferably with some idea of numbers, even if it is only "common" or "infrequent".
- 6) Lists of birds you see on a regular trip on dog walks or in your garden possibly in the form of maximum/minimum numbers of say Silvereyes or Singing Honeyeaters that you see on that 5km jog you do every Sunday morning.
- 7) **Holiday lists** for more remote areas. If you are travelling about, send in a list for each area. Even if you only go on a family holiday to Albany, Geraldton, Kalbarri etc., these records could be useful.

Geoff Shannon,
15 Lagonda Drive,
Gwelup, W.A. 6021.

WADER STUDY GROUP REPORT

1. Summary of Perth Sub-group Activities.

The mainstay of the Wader Study Group, migratory waders, began to leave for their northern hemisphere breeding grounds in March and by the end of April, lack of birds and inclement weather brought most of our field activities to a close. This has given us time to repair equipment and think about buying some more and has allowed us to begin examining our data, some of which is proving quite interesting. This report briefly summarizes the work carried out this season; a more detailed account will hopefully be produced for *The Stilt*, the bulletin of the Australasian Wader Study Group.

Between 9/10/82 and 17/4/83, the group went netting 25 times, five of these occasions involving the use of cannon nets. Four of the 25 attempts yielded no birds and the best single catch was 129 waders, at Pelican Point, with mist nets. The accompanying table presents a summary of the numbers of birds handled, including non-wader species which we have done some work on. If things don't seem to add up right on this table, please note that "within season" recaptures are not added to the "total individuals handled" column, as birds recaptured within the season have already been handled earlier in that season. Also note that while any casualty is regrettable, the casualty rate this season has been very low (under 1%) and is a tribute to the skill of our extractors.

As in previous seasons, Red-necked Stints and Curlew Sandpipers were the most-caught species. While it is always pleasing to catch a few of the less common species, catches made of the abundant species are the most valuable in providing and leading to information. We now have data on the age composition of the populations of these species in the Perth area. The three age categories which we can recognise (under one year, between one and two years, and over two years — which are adults) were in roughly equal proportions in our stint sample, but very unequal for the Curlew Sandpiper. By far the majority of the Curlew Sand's were juveniles. This suggests that the behaviour of these species differs and work in future seasons may give us a clearer indication of these differences. Possibly, Curlew Sandpipers do not form mixed-age flocks, or it may be that adult birds do not return to wintering areas which they went to as juveniles. On the other hand, this could have been an exceptional season for the species, due to an unusually successful breeding season last year.

Curlew Sandpipers have also been notable this season because of their **primary feather moult**. According to accepted wader wisdom, juvenile waders do not or very rarely moult when in Australia. While the stints obeyed this wisdom, almost all of the juvenile Curlew Sand's ignored it and moulted at least their outer primaries and, in some cases, all of them. Again, we don't know if that is what we should expect from the species or if it is unusual.

"Within-season" recaptures have provided us with a clearer idea of **local wader movements**, birds moving frequently between sites such as Lake Forrestdale, the Estuary and Rott-nest Island. "Between-season" recaptures are possibly even more interesting, as they reveal birds that have **returned to the same site** after going all the way to northern Asia to breed. However, honours should go to a non-migratory wader, a Red-capped Plover, which was first banded at Pelican Point on 10/11/79, and was caught twice there this season.

Several of the "between-season" recaptures have not been traced as yet, so they may be of birds originally banded by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife before the Wader Study Group started up in 1979, or they could be of **birds banded elsewhere in Australia**. The latter possibility would be very exciting, as there are very few recorded movements between the south-west and the rest of Australia, although obviously such movements must occur. The most recent record is for a Red-necked Stint banded at Pelican Point on 24/10/81 and caught at Ralph's Bay, in Tasmania, on 2/1/83.

While the return of the migratory waders is keenly awaited so that we can try to find answers to all the questions generated by this season's work, activities will start even

before they arrive. The **winter national wader count** takes place in July and people who have been involved in that in the past will be notified. Anyone who would like to become involved should contact one of us. Starting from that July count, it is intended to begin a year of **national monthly counts at important sites**, a very ambitious and potentially valuable project which will require many counters. If you aren't sure of your waders but would like to give it a go, remember that there is no better way to learn them than to go out and try to count and identify them! Mike Bamford will be out of Perth for most of July, so any enquiries regarding these counts should go to Doug Watkins.

Mike Bamford, 5 Elizabeth St, South Perth, 6151.

367 3032 (a/h)

Doug Watkins, 3 Jane St, Applecross, 6153.

364 6514

Summary of catches by the W.A. branch of the Wader Study Group; 1982-1983 season.

species	No. of birds	recaptures		casualties	total individuals handled
		between seasons	within season		
a. Waders					
Red-necked Stint	457	16	12	4	477
Curlew Sandpiper	290	2	12	1	293
Red-capped Plover	52	5	1	1	58
Red Knot	54	—	1	2	56
Great Knot	17	—	—	—	17
Ruddy Turnstone	10	—	—	1	11
Black-winged Stilt	8	2	—	—	10
Grey Plover	5	—	—	—	5
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	3	—	—	—	3
Red-necked Avocet	3	—	—	—	3
Banded Stilt	2	—	—	—	2
Red-kneed Dotterel	2	—	—	—	2
Common Sandpiper	1	—	—	—	1
Sanderling	1	—	—	—	1
Terek Sandpiper	1	—	—	—	1
Greenshank	1	—	—	—	1
b. Other waterbirds banded					
Spotless Crake	7	—	—	—	7
Baillon's Crake	2	—	—	—	2
Australian Crake	2	—	—	—	2
Buff-banded Rail	1	—	—	—	1
Crested Tern	9	—	—	—	9
Fairy Tern	1	—	—	—	1
Totals:					
waders	907	25	26	9	941
non-waders	22	—	—	—	22
all-birds	929	25	26	9	963

2. North-West Wader Study Expedition No. 6.

Just a reminder to keep the dates **October 22 to November 12** in mind if you are interested in participating in the next expedition. You can attend at any stage during this period, although participation for more than five days and **prior notice** of your intended movements would be most helpful.

Contacts: Mike Bamford and Doug Watkins.

SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by RAOU Field Officer, Roger Jaensch.

Results

Most data received to the end of March 1983 has been entered in the computer and printouts have been obtained. These display and summarise the information that has been gathered over the 22 month period July 1981 to March 1983. My thanks are extended to all those who have committed many hours to searching for and counting waterbirds in wetland nature reserves — particularly where birds have been difficult to come by. Copies of computer printout are currently being prepared for posting to participants, but I have extracted some points of interest for your perusal here.

A. Wetlands (Reserve Parts).

(1) Number of wetlands surveyed so far.

(a) overall: 127

(b) within each region: Kalbarri (1); Dongara (3); Juriengingin (17); Harvey (12); Wongan-Tammin (8); Narrogin (43); Denmark-Cranbrook (13); Southern Cross (1); Newdegate (8); Bremer-Manypeaks (8); Esperance-Munglinup (13); Condingup-Israelite (1).

These figures reflect the number of wetland nature reserves within each region. However, quite a few wetlands still require coverage in the Wongan-Tammin, Narrogin, Denmark-Cranbrook and Newdegate regions (see below).

Some 366 wetlands are to be inspected in this study but many of these (probably more than one third) are small salt lakes or rarely-inundated salt-flats. We will endeavour to cover wetlands of this type in a concerted effort at a favourable time.

(2) Most wetlands surveyed in any month = 74, in July (1982) of Year 1: the 13th survey month.

(3) Wetlands at which the most surveys have been conducted.

Thomsons L. (64); Pt. Waylen (44); Forrestdale L. (29); Bambun L. (25); Wannamal L. (23); Vasse Estuary (23).

Many of the surveys at Thomsons Lake were incomplete — simply recordings of birds noticed during crane trapping exercises. All bar Wannamal have more than one observer counting waterbirds regularly.

(4) The most (statistically) important wetlands.

Overall — in the whole study area.

— with the most species recorded: Forrestdale Lake — 57 out of a possible 115 species (50%).

— with the most breeding species recorded: Toolibin Lake — 17 out of 56 waterbird species known to breed in the South-West (30%).

— with the largest number of individual birds counted, in any month: Peel Inlet East and South — 41,157 in November of Year 2 (Nov. 1982).

This result is most interesting, because these are three completely different types of wetland and each is presently threatened by one or more serious environmental disturbances. Forrestdale L. is a shallow, reed-fringed, open coastal lake and is subject to groundwater extraction and insecticide sprays. Toolibin L. is a timbered inland lake which is "dying" from rising salinity of inflow — it is one of the last major wheatbelt lakes not yet ruined by salt. Peel Inlet is a large, shallow estuary disturbed by increasing urbanisation and algae growth.

Other wetlands with a high number of species recorded are Thomsons L. (54), Peel Inlet (53), Pt. Waylen (53) and Vasse Estuary (43). Important breeding wetlands also include Chandala Swamp (11 species), Wannamal L. (10), Thomsons L. (10) and Forrestdale L. (9). Wetlands not yet mentioned which figure prominently in the category of "most birds counted" are Warden L. (16,919 birds) and Tordit-Garrup L. (12,036). Using a five point scoring system, Thomsons L. and Chandala Swamp join the three top wetlands in the group of the five most "important" wetlands overall.

Wetlands can be considered important for waterbirds in other ways as well. For instance, Tordit-Garrup L. is a major moulting area for Australian Shelducks, but does not appear to support a great number or variety of other species. If your wetland is not in the "super" class, you could nevertheless make some important discoveries during your surveys there. For example, you might find nesting pairs of Hoary-headed Grebes or Black-fronted Plovers — both have surprisingly few breeding records in the Project to date. The following notes may give you ideas of other birds to keep a watch on or search for.

B. Species.

(1) Number of species recorded overall = 96 (83% of the possible 115). Many of the remaining species have only been recorded as vagrants to the South-West.

(2) Number of breeding species overall = 42 (75% of the possible 56). This is an encouraging result, although many species have only been noted breeding on one occasion.

(3) Notable species not yet recorded at all: Black Bittern, Lewin's Rail, Painted Snipe.

Black Bitterns have been found in wetlands not in our study (see p.1) and with a concerted effort, should be found in several of our reserves (riversides or paperbark swamps). The other two species have not been recorded for many years and some suggest that they are locally extinct!

(4) Species recorded from only one wetland: Little Bittern, Royal Spoonbill, White-winged Tern.

Little Bitterns are quite widespread here in coastal swamps (spring and summer only?) — listen for their "wood-sawing" calls (see *W. A. Bird Notes* No 23, p. 5). Look out for Royal Spoonbills amongst Yellow-billed but be careful with strong light as this gives the Yellow-billed a darker-looking bill — legs must also be black, for a Royal.

(5) Species not yet recorded breeding: Australasian Bittern, Chestnut Teal, Buff-banded Rail, Hooded Plover, Red-necked Avocet, Whiskered Tern.

Nesting Chestnut Teal could be found in quite a few Great Southern wetlands (tree hollows) while Buff-banded Rails sometimes parade their youngsters around boldly in late spring. Hooded Plovers and Red-necked Avocets are ground-nesting birds which could breed on any number of salty wetlands (eg. in Newdegate region).

(6) Most important species (statistically).

(a) most widespread (no. of wetlands recorded from):	(b) breeding localities (no. of wetlands breeding in):
Grey Teal (93)	Black Swan (35)
A. Shelduck (92)	A. Shelduck (31)
Pacific Black Duck (78)	Coot (27)
Black Swan (78)	Grey Teal (25)
Coot (64)	Pacific Black Duck (16)
A. Shoveler (54)	Red-capped Plover (15)
Musk Duck (49)	Pink-eared Duck (10)
Black-winged Stilt (48)	Purple Swamphen (8)
Pink-eared Duck (45)	Black-tailed Native-hen (7)
Hardhead (42)	Hardhead (6)

(c) largest monthly aggregates for the whole study area:

Grey Teal	24,182
Banded Stilt	20,526
A. Shelduck	17,246
Coot	9,462
Red-necked Stint	9,407
Black Swan	7,326
Pacific Black Duck	7,040
Black-winged Stilt	6,893
Pink-eared Duck	6,254
Silver Gull	4,049

(d) species rankings — (combining points scored for rankings on each of lists a, b & c: 10 points for 1st, 1 point for 10th, etc.).

1. Grey Teal
2. A. Shelduck
3. Black Swan
4. Pacific Black Duck
5. Coot

Notice that ducks figure prominently in all three lists — especially in the "most widespread" list. Waders make a strong showing in the aggregate list. Both these results are quite expectable. Obviously, most of the species in the breeding list have conspicuous nesting activity — either large nests, or distraction displays.

The monthly aggregates are a first approximation to the population sizes for these species in the South-West. Because many wetlands are not in our study, these figures have less significance but do at least show relative abundances.

(7) Further comments on species.

Hoary-headed Grebe — only breeding in 2 wetlands out of 47 (4%) at which recorded.

Cormorants — peak numbers occur in winter months. 7

