



# 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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### STARLINGS: DARK INVADERS FROM THE EAST

Two major outbreaks of starlings discovered within W.A. in October 1982 caused a major deployment of APB personnel to facilitate the eradication of these birds. At some times, over twenty men were engaged in starling control.

A flock of approximately 120 birds was discovered at Merivale, east of Esperance. Starlings have been destroyed in the area in previous eradication campaigns. This flock probably arose from a breeding up of some missed starlings. The initial flock may have been established by aviary escapees.

However, a second method of establishment could have occurred. Starlings have been recorded flying long distances. Migration from South Australia or Tasmania would be possible. The migration of a small flock would explain why starlings were not reported during the intervening years between destruction campaigns.

Further east, starlings were discovered in a large flock, by Western Australian standards. Five hundred starlings were monitored feeding extensively on sea lice in the sea-weed banks which have been prolific over much of the coastline from Eucla to Eyre.

Smaller flocks were also monitored at Eucla and Madura. The Eucla flock was successfully controlled while the Madura flock was not. The Madura birds (approximately 80) may have moved east and intermingled with the Mundrabilla starlings. It was unlikely that they would have moved westwards as Eyre is constantly watching for starlings.

Approximately 500 starlings were destroyed and of these, one hundred were eliminated at Merivale and the remainder on the Nullarbor. The latest W.A. starling count (12.7.83) was: Eucla area—12, Mundrabilla—6 and Esperance—22.

Peter Coyle, 14 July 1983  
AGRICULTURE PROTECTION ADVISER



Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*.

Photo by Jeremy Dixon, A.P.B.

## HAPPY HERONS, DELIGHTED DUCKS, & CLUCKY COOTS

or Waterbirds 1983-84: a special challenge

Intense periods of winter rain have filled the wetlands under study in the South-West Waterbird Project, pushing levels to the highest seen for five or more years. Data from reserves monitored by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife indicate that 14 wetlands have more than 2.0 metres of water (at the deepest point), while 25 have depths of more than 1.5 metres (compared with 12 and 18, July 1982).

Such good levels often only occur at intervals of perhaps five to ten years. Although the floods in January 1982 caused a similar effect in part of the South-West, the current water 'surplus' will provide an abundance of waterbird breeding habitat within the more usual breeding season. We expect the birds to fully capitalise on this situation.

Some wetlands should be used by greater numbers of birds than in recent years and by different species in some cases. For example, Blue-billed Ducks, which dive for their food and prefer fresher water, may appear for several months on salty lakes flooded by one or two metres of relatively fresh water. Fringing vegetation not usually flooded by a lake, might support breeding by ducks, coots and grebes where it is now inundated.

Of course, lakes improved by the floods will retain water and hence waterbirds, further into summer or autumn in this waterbird season. Some wetlands may benefit from small nearby swamps, which will hold water long enough this season to provide breeding or feeding habitat for waterbirds (eg. feed for herons). As many wetlands dry out later in the season, the good breeding success of many species should become apparent as immatures and adults gather at remaining water bodies.

Participants in the SWWP are encouraged to make full use of these opportunities to boost waterbird usage data for their wetlands. Observers may need to set aside more time to achieve complete coverage of their wetlands if that is their usual goal. In larger lakes and swamps, forays could be made into sections not previously flooded within the Project period. If access to canoes or rowboats is possible, now is the time to get them into action!

The challenge is out in front of the 'wetfoots' (SWWP participants) in 1983-84. Also, any birdo with time to stop at a SWWP wetland in travels about the South-West, should contact the Field Officer for suggestions of places to visit. Anything could turn up — there is only one way to find out what it might be!

*(see more on the SWWP in this issue)*

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## COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

- Sep. 5—**Meeting**, Cygnet Hall: G. Chapman.  
Sep. 6-11—**CAMPOUT**, Yallingup.  
Sep. 17—Local Excursion, Bickley.  
Sep. 18—Tree Planting, Alcoa Wetland Reserve, Baldivis.  
Sep. 24—Local Excursion, Pelican Point/Alfred Cove.  
Sep. 26—**Meeting**, Cygnet Hall: J. Lane.  
Sep. 29-Oct. 5—**CAMPOUT**, Fitzgerald R. Nat. Park.  
  
Oct. 15—Local Excursion, Walyunga Nat. Park.  
Oct. 29-30—Weekend Trip, Karakin/Samphire/Moore R./Guraga L.  
  
Nov. 5-6—**CAMPOUT**, Woodanilling.  
Nov. 12—Local Excursion, Wungong Gorge.  
Nov. 26—Day Trip, Coo loongup L & Alcoa Claypit Reserve.  
Nov. 28—**Meeting**, Cygnet Hall: B. Wells.  
  
Dec. 2-3—Summer Bird Tally.  
Dec. 3—**\*\*\*Annual Social Night\*\*\***, Applecross.  
Dec. 10—Local Excursion, Canning Estuary.  
  
Jan. 6—**A.G.M.**, Clunies Ross Centre.

READ ON FOR DETAILS . . .

## 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, 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.

**Monday, November 28. Special Meeting No.2. Bert & Babs Wells—"Let's Go Wild"**—a slide/sound production, programmed on tape, especially put together for the annual convention of the Australian Photographic Society in Hobart, during September 1983. The production has an agreeable mix of field photographic techniques and wildlife photography.

**Saturday, December 3. Annual Social Night alias Christmas Dinner.**

This year we have planned an informal extravaganza separate from the A.G.M. and it will be held in the spacious rear grounds of **No.3 Jane St., Applecross** (phone 364 6514). Our **all-inclusive price of \$10** includes sizzling sumptuous steak, salubrious salads, succulent sweets and refreshing wines, soft drinks and beverages. School age children will be admitted for **half-price** and those under 10 will gain entry free of charge!

There will be countless prizes to be raffled off against your entry ticket, which you will receive at the door at **no extra cost**. Prizes so far donated are:

**Books**—several bird books valued at over \$100;

**Binoculars**—two pairs of new Steiner binox valued at over \$200;

**Exquisite Pen-Sketch**—donated by the famous recluse, Michael J. Bamford, framed by the P. de Rebeira Gallery: value—beyond price!

We really do need more prizes. These can be quite small, so please make an effort to contribute. Also needed are 'nibbles' (caviar is acceptable) for 200 people — can anyone help? In addition and finally, we are desperately in need of man and woman-power: any volunteers?

Please **book** immediately, or at latest by **30 November**, with Joan Seabrook or Roger Jaensch: addresses on page 1.

**Friday, January 6, 1984. A.G.M. at the Clunies Ross Centre, 20 Stirling Highway, Nedlands.** Parking available underneath. Commencing at 8.00 p.m.

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## COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

**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.

#### Sunday September 18: Tree-Planting at the RAOU-Alcoa Artificial

Wetland Reserve. The rehabilitated claypit reserve is located on Zig Zag Road, Baldvis. Take Kerosene Lane off the old Mandurah road and you will see the pit banks as you reach the end of the lane. Turn right, continue for a few hundred metres and then turn left off the bitumen into the gravel **Zig Zag Rd.** The claypit entrance is on the left after a similar distance (soon after the drain).

Alcoa has offered a large stock of seedlings for us to plant out on the banks and edges of the lagoon. These will provide shelter and nesting sites for waterbirds. Meet on site at 10.00 a.m. for a day of constructive fun!

#### 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 Whip-bird 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: 4 have booked already) and some cooking facilities. There are also two toilets and two rainwater tanks and a 240V generator will 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.

#### Saturday October 15: Local Excursion to Walyunga National Park.

Meet at 0800 at the Long Pool carpark in the Park. Note that an honour box is placed at the entrance! Bush-birding and possibly hiking, in mixed woodland with good scenery. As always, newcomers welcome!

#### October 29-30: Weekend or day trip—Karakin/Samphire/Moore R. /Guraga.

Meet at 0830 at the Moore River bridge on the **Lancelin Road**. We will proceed to look for Emu-wrens and Calamanthus in coastal heath and then go on to **Karakin Lakes** for (hopefully) a host of waterbirds. Those who wish to stay overnight will adjourn to Di Beckingham's sanctuary in Wanerie Rd., West Gingin (see **Notices**).

Campers must be self-sufficient. Di has seen the Little Bittern in the swamp on her sanctuary.

On the Sunday, we will gather at 0900 at the bridge over the Moore River on **Cowalla Road**, from where we will investigate part of the Moore River National Park. After lunch at Reagan's Ford, we plan to continue up the Brand Highway for 18 km (just before a small 'lake' next to a farmhouse), turning left into a prominent firebreak. This 4WD track leads to **Guraga Lake**, a rarely-visited wetland in 'untouched' Banksia woodland.

November 5-6, Campout: Woodanilling. Members and friends have been invited by **Ray Garstone** to camp at the **Woodanilling Sports Ground**, in the small town of Woodanilling, between Wagin and Katanning. We will have access to hot showers and some power and the camp area is adjacent to good birding spots. Again, be self-sufficient please, although shearing sheds will be available if weather is wet.

Our visit should be at the **peak of breeding** by Regent and Elegant Parrots, sittellas, robins, Little and Wedge-tailed Eagles and possibly even Crested Shrike-tits. Ray is particularly conversant with nest-finding and is an accomplished photographer. He will lead us to salmon gum, wandoo and sandplain habitats in three handy nature reserves and we may also have time to look at waterbirds on the chain of lakes to the west.

An event not to be missed! Just roll up at the camp on Friday night or on Saturday morning. We will **rally** in camp at 1000 on Saturday.

November 12, Local Excursion: Wungong Gorge. Meet at 0800 on the South-West Highway, at its junction with Eleventh Rd., Wungong. The Gorge is one of the most **northerly haunts** of White-breasted Robins, Red-winged Fairy-wrens and Red-eared Firetails.

#### November 26, Day Trip: Lake Coo loongup and Alcoa Claypit

Reserve. Meet at 0800 at the deli/petrol station near the intersection of the old Mandurah road and Fifty Rd., Baldvis. Water and bush-birds (e.g. herons, Regent Parrots) at the south end of Coo loongup Lake; afterwards to the claypit (see directions for 18/9/83).

December 2-3, Summer Bird Tally. There will be a thrilling bird tally in the **24 hours** leading up to the Social Night on the 3rd. The objectives will be for individuals or teams to find **as many bird species as possible** within the boundaries of 31° and 32° latitude South and 116° 30' longitude East. The time scale allows for nocturnal birds and restrictions on **distance** travelled will be set.

This will be a great opportunity for newcomers to learn a terrific lot about *where and when* birds can be found, close to Perth. Interested persons should contact **Peter Curry**, 29 Canning Mills Rd., Kelmescott, 6111 (phone 390 6995) by 30 November, to enter themselves or their teams or ask to join a team. No prizes will be given but there will be a **competition at the party** on the 3rd, to guess the total number of bird species found in the Tally.

#### Saturday, December 10, Local Excursion: Canning River, Wilson.

Meet at 0800 at the Kent St., weir on the Canning River, Wilson. A guided tour of a beautiful riverine forest and wetland complex, right in the metro area! Possible crane and rail spotting if the tide is suitable.

**NOTE:** Keep an eye on the 'West' and local newspapers for impromptu excursions. These usually start at the John Forrest Roundabout in Kings Park.

## MEETING REPORTS

### June 27, Members' Night

Despite wild, wet weather and an unavoidable puddle at the entrance to Cygnet Hall, 65 enthusiasts attended the June RAOU Meeting. Mutton-bird man Peter Curry had been left speechless by a throat infection, so two video-tapes were shown instead. The first was taken during the joint RAOU-Durham University Great Sandy Desert Expedition in 1981 and the other, shown by Peter Coyle, was about Starling eradication by the APB. Dr. Stephen Davies also presented slides of ostrich farming in South Africa, from his recent study tour.

The rest of the evening was left to short accounts of RAOU member activities in W.A. Mike Bamford spoke on the Wader Study Group, Roger Jaensch on the Waterbird Survey and Geoff Shannon on the Annual Bird Report. Jim Lane gave an account of progress with RAOU-Alcoa artificial waterbird reserve at Baldivis and other speakers included Steve Keeling who spoke on his study of Reed Warblers at Herdsman Lake.

A large display of bird books and Christmas cards (depicting birds), was presented and many sales were realised. Bob Goodale held the winning ticket in the raffle of Graeme Chapman's Blue-billed Duck print. Proceeds from this generous donation went to the Eyre Suzuki motor 'appeal'.

The meeting was particularly successful because members had sufficient time to talk to each other and to newcomers.

## EXCURSION REPORTS

### May 21, Yanchep

About 25 local members were joined by a couple of interstate visitors to the ANZAAS Conference, for an outing to Yanchep National Park on Saturday, 21st May. On a fine sunny day, Geoff Shannon led the group to some of his banding sites in the less-frequented parts of the Park. A total of 33 species was seen, adding five to the short list that had been handed out at the start.

Early on, a Brown Goshawk and a Collared Sparrowhawk were seen 'thermallng' together, giving a useful comparison between these two very similar species. Later, two Wedge-tailed Eagles performed for us. A Striated Pardalote showed an interest in a hole in a jarrah tree, rather early for nesting. A couple of White-backed Swallows were flying near their spring nesting site. Fan-tailed Cuckoos had arrived for the winter and most people saw a party of Varied Sittellas, which are uncommon in the Park. The five common honeyeaters rounded off a pleasant day.

Geoff Shannon

### Wheatbelt Excursion

On Saturday, June 11th, 26 members and interested friends travelled to the wheatbelt from Perth, initially stopping at Northam where they were met by seven country birdos (5 from Northam-Toodyay and 2 from Williams).

During a day of exceptional beauty, four areas were covered. The Avon River in Northam (briefly); the western side of Wongamine Reserve; the eastern or top side of the same reserve; and Majestic Heights, near the Toodyay Racecourse. All these sites were interesting because of their contrasting environments quite apart from the birds that we found there. Wongamine (east) surprised us with its wandoo and sandplain heath living cheek by jowl, whilst Majestic Heights offered us steep hills, valleys and impressive jarrah and powder-bark wandoo woodland.

We saw a total of 51 birds including one, a Barn Owl, new to the Wongamine locality. Other interesting observations included White-cheeked Honeyeaters, a Painted Button-quail, a White-fronted Chat's nest with 3 eggs, a brightly coloured White-winged Fairy-wren and a Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

The city birdos would like to record a vote of thanks to Lindsay Milhinch and Jim Masters who led the excursion.

B. Wells

### June 25, Local Excursion

Several newcomers were among those birdos who gathered in King's Park for the June Local Excursion. Instead of speeding off to some distant destination, we decided to show newcomers what King's Park had to offer to bird students. We were fortunate in being able to compare the diagnostic features of New Holland and White-cheeked Honeyeaters and Red and Little Wattlebirds. Newcomers were especially impressed with Western Spinebills feeding within arm's reach.

After a while we rendezvoused with jet-setting Steve Keeling, who had momentarily alighted in the reed beds of Herdsman Lake. Besides a fair variety of waterbirds, the group was intrigued by the now-resident Chestnut-breasted Mannikins. All in all, another great outing, 42 species being tallied on the day.

Simon Nevill

## ROTTNEST RETREAT

The RAOU has recently been investigating ways of establishing an 'observatory' with high visitor use, on Rottnest Island. As a test of the year-round appeal of Rottnest to birdos, the W.A. Group booked one of the old Rottnest chalets (Cottage G) from June 30 to July 11, offering cheap but comfortable accommodation to members. At various times, 27 birdos stayed overnight and at least seven day-visitors joined our group.

After the Field Officer took possession of the cottage on the 30th, Steve and Diana Keeling and family came across and took on the job of organising the catering and activities for the bulk of the retreat period. Our sincere thanks to them for a tremendous effort, enabling the RAOU to even make a token profit from the venture. Meals were sumptuous and the mulled wine was apparently a delirious success! Weather conditions were variable but sometimes very pleasant. A log book of all events and observations was dutifully maintained and is available for members to scrutinise.

### Activities:

- 1) **Bus trips to Cape Vlamingh and daily sea-watches** from closer capes yielded number of Gannets, Black-browed and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, a single Wandering Albatross, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and a Giant Petrel, while skuas were seen from the ferry.
- 2) **Daily wader counts on the lakes** and on some beaches produced 12 wader species including Pied Oystercatchers (up to 9 on the golf course), 147 Ruddy Turnstones, seven tattlers and two Sanderlings.
- 3) **Osprey-watching** led to ten nests being located. One adult was seen bathing on Ricey Beach.
- 4) **A census was made of nesting Silver Gulls and Crested Terns** on six islands and spits within the lake complex. One Crested Tern site had 34 nests with sitting birds and 53 with downies, while 180 runners screamed nearby. Fourty-one dead young were found at one gull colony.
- 5) **Perry de Rebeira** gave a talk on the history of bird study at Rottnest and recent CSIRO work. Perry suggested that while White-faced Herons and swans had decreased in numbers since settlement, Red-necked Avocets, Sacred Kingfishers and Tree Martins had increased.
- 6) **Colour-banded Red-capped Robins, Golden Whistlers and Singing Honeyeaters** (an endemic subspecies) were searched for with a little success.
- 7) **Ring-necked Pheasants** were widespread at the east end of the island, the Golf Course surrounds being a stronghold.
- 8) **Sacred Kingfishers:** at least eight were seen at the settlement, in copses beside lakes and at caves.
- 9) **Other bird highlights included Rock Parrots (up to nine, on ten days), a Spotted Harrier, a Long-billed Corella and a possible Buff-banded Rail.**

Results from observations during the retreat were therefore pleasing, adding a little more to our knowledge of birds on Rottnest.

## RAOU/APB STARLING SEARCH

The APB/RAOU Common Starling search once again provided the opportunity for RAOU members to do valuable work and enjoy themselves at the same time.

Sixteen RAOU members helped the APB search along known tracks between Madura and Israelite Bay for starlings. Starlings had been found at Israelite Bay and increasing numbers were caught in trap cages at Madura, sparking fears of a westward migration of these birds. Starlings are aggressive birds that displace native bird species and cause extensive damage to crops, fruit, stock feed and buildings.

So it was with visions of finding lots of starlings and a nice lamb on a spit that we drove the 1000 km to base camp near Balladonia. From there the party split into four groups (in only seven vehicles!) in order to cover the maximum area possible. Searching was undertaken by observing from moving vehicles at dawn and dusk, supplemented by forays on foot. Three days later, as previously agreed, all vehicles returned to the base camp — except for one! After much speculation as to whether the absent party had got lost at the Balledonia Pub, one of the absent party returned in another vehicle to announce that they had staked two tyres!

Fortunately no starlings had been sighted and after some re-assessment and swapping of people and vehicles, a further three day search was mounted. As we had covered most of the tracks, considerable freedom of searching area was given to most parties. Although some new areas were covered, most parties seemed to think a brief look around Eyre Bird Observatory would be useful!

A total of 92 species of birds was seen between Madura and Israelite Bay. Highlights were Naretha Blue Bonnets, some Ground Cuckoo-shrikes, and a magnificent White-bellied Sea-Eagle seen at Toolina Cove. Numerous incredible sights and encounters with birds and other fauna were reported in discussions around the campfire on the final night.

Although no starlings were seen by us, unfortunately this does not mean that none were there. The APB has since written to the RAOU expressing sincere thanks for our effort and noting that it was a most valuable exercise.

Ron Van Delft.

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

### 1. Report from Di Congreve

The second quarter of 1983 was relatively quiet at Eyre, although some interesting sightings were recorded. In contrast, the first half of July was extremely busy and produced many worthwhile results, especially during the Botany Course held from 10-16 July by Dr. Stephen Hopper from the Wildlife Research Centre of the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife. Extracts from our logbook follow:

- April 29 — The annual invasion of Silvereyes started and 31 birds were trapped in one net.
- April 30 — An immature White-winged Triller was seen on the Hampton Tableland. This is much earlier than in past years.
- May 2 — While visiting Twilight Cove, we recorded the White-bellied Sea-Eagle and Peregrine Falcon and on Kanidal Beach, an Oriental Plover. The 'Friends of Eyre' association was founded, the first project being to raise enough money to repair 'Suki', our old Suzuki.
- May 11 — An Echidna had to be bodily removed from the track to Twilight Cove to allow the vehicle to pass. This is the only one seen in the past three years.
- June 5 — Beach count to 9 Mile recorded 137 Red-capped Plovers, 7 Double-banded Plovers, 12 Sanderling, 21 Red-necked Stints, 11

- Curlew Sandpipers, 2 Grey Teal, 2 Pied Oystercatchers, 1 Sooty Oystercatcher, 8 Silver Gulls and 6 Caspian Terns.
- June 10 — On the weed bank at 9 Mile were 22 White-faced Herons.
- July 4 — Two Southern Right Whales (mother and calf) were sighted close inshore off Kanidal Beach.
- July 10 — A Bustard was seen on the Haig track, SE of Cocklebidy.
- July 16 — National Wader Count, Twilight to 9 Mile: a disappointing result compared with 5/6/83.
- July 17 — Don and Donna Reid arrive to look after Eyre while we (Peter and Di) have our annual holiday.

### 2. Courses at Eyre

- 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 card records 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 30th-  
November 5th — **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.
- December 11-17 — **Field Ornithology.** Dr. Stephen Davies and Peter Congreve. This course is the fourth organised by Stephen, and will be marked by his expertise and systematic approach to field work. The course will include mist netting as a means of studying birds in the hand, techniques for counting birds and field census methods. Sound records as a means of studying and mapping territory. This course is most interesting in its suggestion of methods to carry bird watching a step further.

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 RAOU reserves the right to vary fees and charges should circumstances over which it has no control make this necessary.

The above programme may be subject to amendment and applications for each course (with preferences for other courses in case one is full), should be directed as soon as possible to:

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

### 3. Courses at Rotamah and Barren Grounds.

#### BARREN GROUNDS COURSES

- September 9-11 — **Bird Calls.** Their identification and recording.  
September 30-  
October 3 — **The Wild Flowers of Barren Grounds.**  
October 7-9 — **Birds' Nests and Territories.**  
November 11-13 — **Birds for Beginners.**  
November 18-20 — **Ground Parrots and Bristlebirds.**  
November 25-27 — **Fire Ecology Workshop (2).**  
December 2-4 — **The Reptiles and Amphibians of Barren Grounds.**  
December 30, '83-  
January 2, '84 — **Ground Parrots and Christmas Bells.**

Barren Grounds Bird Observatory,  
Box 3, Jamberoo, N.S.W. 2533.  
Telephone: (042) 36 0195.

#### ROTAMAH COURSES

- October 14-17 — **Finding Nests.**  
October 29-  
November 1 — **Native Animals.**  
December 2-5 — **Ants and Other Insects.**

Rotamah Island Bird Observatory,  
P.O. Box 75,  
Paynesville, Vic. 3880.  
Telephone: (051) 56 6398.

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## W.A. BIRD REPORT

Enclosed with this issue is a Bird Report form for the year 1983. You need not use the forms, but if requiring more, please write to Geoff Shannon, 15 Lagonda Dr., Gwelup, 6021. This form does at least indicate the type of information we would like for casual observations or trip lists. Refer to previous issues of this newsletter for more information on the Report. The 1982 Report should be out shortly.

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## WADER STUDY GROUP

### 1. Report on Activities.

Just when participants in the various activities of the Study Group were thinking how nice it was to be able to watch the few waders around without counting them or considering how best to net them, a meeting of the Group was called. This was for several purposes, one of which was to discuss plans for the coming season. It probably seemed that the '82-'83 season was hardly over before the beginning of the '83-'84 season was announced!

At this meeting, held on June 18, results of further analysis of the '82-'83 season were presented, most attention being paid to ageing, moult, recaptures and monthly counts. Some of these points were considered in the June *Bird Notes*, but mention of a few additional findings here won't go astray. Firstly, the mystery of ageing and sex in the Red-capped Plover.

While samples of the three migratory waders which we caught in large numbers (Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Red

Knot) were dominated by juveniles (42%, 76% and 62% respectively), a meagre 7% of the Red-capped Plovers captured were in this age category. This can be explained by any one of a multitude of reasons, but it does suggest that juvenile Red-capped Plovers move away from the areas where they are raised. Unusually large flocks of Red-caps were observed at Pelican Point early in the season, and these may have been juveniles about to embark upon such a movement. On the other hand, the observations may be quite unrelated.

An additional peculiarity of the Red-capped Plover was the sex ratio recorded among the adult birds caught. Males accounted for 75% of these, if the colouration of the head is a reliable guide to sex in this species. Perhaps it isn't (which would upset a lot of what has been said about Red-capped Plovers over the years); or does the data reflect a real imbalance? Do the females leave with the juveniles, assuming that the juveniles themselves leave, or are males simply easier to catch?

Another interesting result unearthed by further data examination relates to the age of recaptured Red-necked Stints. Only 16% of the first-capture Stints were one year old (the 1<sup>+</sup> age category), but an amazing 44% of recaptures belonged to this age category. It would seem that 1<sup>+</sup> Stints are more sedentary, at least on the Swan Estuary, than either younger or older birds. Once again, we have nearly as many theories as to why this should be so as we have members in the Study Group!

The local monthly counts conducted from November to April produced some valuable observations on the importance of particular sites and on the habitat preferences of different waders. Wader habitats in the coastal region from Rockingham to Wanneroo can be divided into four categories (lakes, estuary, coastline and islands) and it was found that the majority of individuals counted of each species were in only one of these habitats. The only species which appeared to have no habitat preference were the Red-necked Stint and Curlew Sandpiper.

In addition to looking at some of the results of the '82-'83 season, part of the meeting was devoted to the coming season. In particular, the new programme of wader counts was discussed. For some years, the Australasian Wader Studies Group (based in Melbourne) has organized two national counts a year, one in February and the other in July. For the '83-'84 season, these counts will continue and indeed the July count has already been carried out, picking up non-migratory waders as well as overwintering individuals of migratory species. However, to find out what happens between July and February, the AWSG has initiated a monthly national counting programme, in which our local group is now taking part. Although the coverage will be less than that of the biannual counts, the monthly counts will provide details of changes in wader numbers at specific sites, which should be especially interesting at the crucial times in spring and autumn when the migratory waders are entering and leaving Australia.

The banding activities of the WAWSG are expected to begin during September, depending on such variables as wader numbers and bander enthusiasm. It is hoped to produce a timetable of banding excursions early in the season so that people who would like to get involved, even for just one night, can do so more easily. However, it will always be a good idea to give Mike or Doug a call beforehand, just in case we decide to go somewhere else.

Mike Bamford 367 3032  
Doug Watkins 364 6514

### North-West Expedition: 22 Oct.—12 Nov.

There are now opportunities for birdos to travel to the North-West by a hired mini-bus at a cost of around \$200 per head. This arrangement is subject to all places being filled, so please contact Mike Bamford if interested. Phone 367 3032 a/h or 332 2468 at work.

# SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by RAOU Field Officer, Roger Jaensch

## 1. Exposé: Australasian Shoveler *Anas rhynchos*

The SWWP has stimulated a great deal of interest in the Australasian Shoveler. This species has probably declined in inland wetlands in the South-West since settlement, as a result of land clearance and subsequent salting of runoff. Shovelers are specialised feeders, filtering animal life from the surface and top centimetres of water bodies. They seem to prefer to feed in fresh water. Although 'deep' salty lakes often support prolific numbers of several invertebrate species, these are not usually taken by shovelers.

Expectably, the fresher coastal plain lakes are the present stronghold of *A. rhynchos*. Thomsons and Forrestdale Lakes have consistently supported the largest concentrations of this bird during the SWWP. The largest flock for the Project has been 2000 at Thomsons Lake in March 1982. Besides these two wetlands, only five others have held more than 100 shovelers: Pinjarrega, Wannamal and Coyrecup Lakes, Peel Inlet and The Broadwater.

Clearly, shovelers are able to exploit salty wetlands at times when large volumes of 'fresh' winter runoff have run in. Of the five wetlands just listed, all but one are almost as salty as seawater for one or two months of the year. Furthermore, shovelers have been recorded at 26 wheatbelt wetlands, besides the 32 near-coastal wetlands they frequent and most of the 26 have supported lowest shoveler numbers in autumn, when levels were lowest and salinities highest.

A different pattern occurs at Esperance where all records fall from October to May. Perhaps these are birds which have used widespread temporary fresh pools until they dried up in late spring, thereafter retreating to the permanent coastal lakes under study?

Australasian Shovelers have now been found at 58 wetlands but only found breeding at five of these. Duck nests are frequently difficult to locate but this is particularly difficult with shovelers, as they tend to nest in tall grass, often not immediately next to water. Observers may be more successful through patient observation of movements by pairs of these birds, but in any case, ducklings are often much easier to spot!

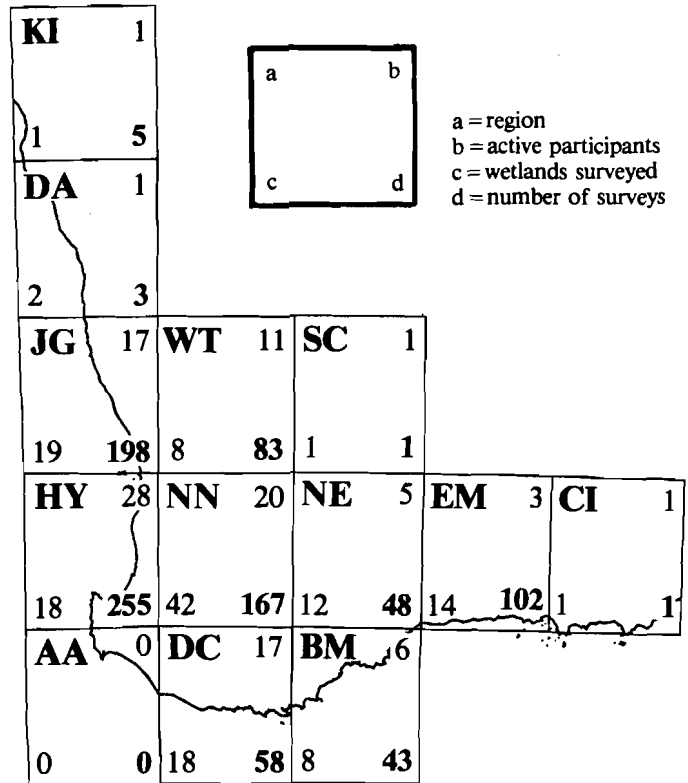
The largest monthly totals for this species in the whole study area, have been 2485 (Jan.) and 2482 (Mar.), no doubt due largely to post-breeding refuge concentrations. Although these figures are bound to be underestimates of the Australasian Shoveler population in the South-West, they look small when compared to the Grey Teal's 24,252 (Dec.). The importance to the Shoveler of wetlands around Perth cannot be too highly stressed and conservationists should not be deceived by the comparative abundance of this species here, where a disproportionate amount of South-West birding time is spent.

## 2. How it all looks on a map

Data received to 22 July, 1983.

Regions used by the SWWP (grid blocks of 2 degree sides):

- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| KI = Kalbarri      | NN = Narrogin            |
| DA = Dongara       | DC = Denmark-Cranbrook   |
| JG = Jurien-Gingin | SC = Southern Cross      |
| HY = Harvey        | NE = Newdegate           |
| AA = Augusta       | BM = Bremer-Manypeaks    |
| WT = Wongan-Tammin | EM = Esperance-Munglinup |
| WT = Wongan-Tammin | CI = Condingup-Israelite |



SPECIES MAPS: highest regional aggregates (for any month).

- = 1-10 birds
- = 11-100
- = 101-1000
- = 1001-5000
- = 5001-10,000
- = 10,001-15,000

