

Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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PHOTOGRAPHING THE WHITE-TAILED GREY FANTAIL

Way back in 1975, when about to undertake some photographic work in the Eastern Goldfields, we were given a 'mud-map' by Julian Ford, directing us to a location where he said we would find the White-tailed form of the Grey Fantail *Rhipidura fuliginosa albicauda*. This form is known to occur in the arid mulga country of southern Northern Territory and the southern interior of Western Australia (see *Emu* 81: 128-243).

It was not until six years later that we were able to visit Julian's location, on a bush track some three kilometres east of the abandoned gold mine site of COMET VALE (N of Kalgoorlie). Within a few minutes of arriving at the precise spot indicated by Julian, we saw this unusual bird for the first time. It immediately distinguished itself from the south-western form of the Grey Fantail *R. fuliginosa preissi* by —

1. its much more spectacular aerial manoeuvres,
2. its distinctive call — a pleasant "descending trill", and
3. the display of its predominantly WHITE tail feathers (*R. f. preissi* only has moderate white edgings to tail feathers).

We found a number of the birds in this area, and it appeared that breeding had just commenced. Two nests were located, the first, which was under construction, was in an acacia shrub. Apparently as a result of our intrusion, it was removed completely by the birds, within 48 hours. The second nest was in the extremity of a low branch of a large *Eucalyptus clelandi*. Unlike the nest of the southern form of the Grey Fantail, it did NOT have a 'tail' underneath. This nest contained one egg.

We returned to the location about two weeks later, to find a very small hatchling in the nest. Because our time was limited, and to avoid undue stress on the nest, only a few photographs were taken — with high speed flash (1/10,000 second). The date was 2 September 1981.

Babs and Bert Wells,
BOX 57, SCARBOROUGH 6019.



ASSAULT ON THE NARROGIN LAKES

Fifteen muscley birdos from Perth, Narrogin, Williams, Dumbleyung and Woodanilling gathered at Noman's Lake Hall on 22 October for a canoeing assault on the chain of lakes east of Narrogin. Our objective was to exploit the deep-flooded conditions in the upper Arthur River system: that is, to obtain simultaneous counts from eight wetlands at the suspected peak of the waterbird breeding season.

Participants used alloy Canadian-style canoes hired from the Shire of Wagin and spent from one to five hours observing, learning and enjoying waterbirds. The only casualties were the young couple who became temporarily disorientated in the wilds of Taarblin Lake!

Expectably, only one species (Grey Teal) tallied more than 500 individuals in the combined wetlands totals: birds were no doubt still dispersed in shallow marshes outside the more permanent wetlands. Other species found at most lakes were Pink-eared Ducks, Coots, White-faced Herons, Black Swans and Australian Shelducks. Highlights were small numbers of Freckled Ducks at three wetlands and a report of a White-bellied Sea-Eagle (rare inland in W.A.) at Ibis Lake. More than 1400 birds of 24 species were counted on the day.

Many species were only found breeding at one wetland (e.g. Hardheads at Taarblin), but the conspicuous common waterbirds were breeding in most wetlands surveyed. The crowning highlight of the exercise was the discovery of an active Freckled Duck's nest in Toolibin Lake (a regular breeding locality for them). The birds had constructed a neat bowl on top of an old swan's nest under a Casuarina tree. Seven glossy white eggs were found in it, ringed with white down. Another good find was four deserted eggs of the Blue-billed Duck in a fallen log in Taarblin Lake.

Although each wetland surveyed was essentially similar, containing both dead and living timber, our results showed clear differences in waterbird usage. Perhaps slight differences in salinity and food supply influenced these differences. The whole exercise was relatively convenient to organise and may be repeated here or at other wetland complexes in the near future.

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR 1984

Jan. 6—*Annual General Meeting*, Clunies Ross Centre, Nedlands.
Jan. 14—*Local Excursion*, Forrestdale Lake.
Jan. 28—*Local Excursion*, Herdsman Lake.
Jan. 27-30—*CAMPOUT*, Torbay.

Feb. 4—*Local Excursion*, Thomsons Lake.
Feb. 18—*Day Trip*, McLarty L/ Austin Bay.
Feb. 26—*Local Excursion*, Wanneroo Lakes.
Feb. 27—*Meeting*, U.W.A., RSPB Videos.

Mar. 10—*Local Excursion*, Bibra/Yangebup Lakes.
Mar. 26—*Meeting*, U.W.A., Peter Curry: Muttonbirds.

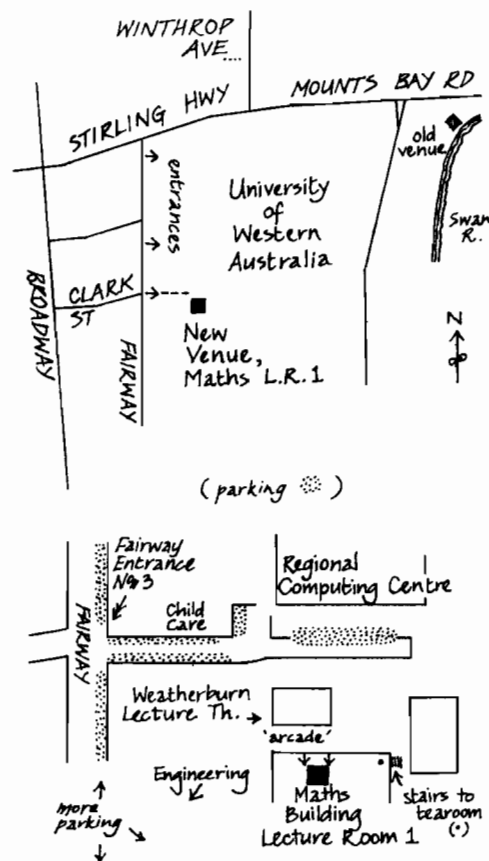
Jun. 25—*Meeting*, U.W.A., Mike Brooker: Wedge-tailed Eagles.

COMING MEETINGS

Friday, January 6, 1984. AGM at the Clunies Ross Centre, 20 Stirling Highway, Nedlands. Come along and have your say in how the W.A. Group will be run in 1984. Commences at 8.00 p.m.; parking available underneath the building.

From February 1984, meetings will be held in **Lecture Room 1** in the **Mathematics Department** at the University of Western Australia. Access is via Entrance No. 3 off Fairway and parking may be available on Fairway or in the University grounds near Entrances 3 and 4. Lecture Room 1 faces the Weatherburn Lecture Theatre, which is part of the Mathematics Department's buildings closest to the tall Regional Computing Centre. Look for the RAOU signs (see also the sketch map below).

Meetings commence at 8.00 p.m. and include tea and biscuits afterwards. Visitors are especially welcome.



Monday, February 27. RSPB Videos. This 'extra' meeting will be used to show the award-winning videos "The Secret Reeds" and "Seabirds" (see last newsletter for descriptions).

Monday, March 26. Peter Curry — Muttonbirds. Peter has now recovered from his laryngitis and is keen to tell us about Dom Serventy's comprehensive study of one of the world's most amazing birds, the Short-tailed Shearwater.

Monday, June 25. Mike Brooker — The Wedge-tailed Eagle. Details in March newsletter.

COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

Keep an eye on *The West* and local newspapers for impromptu excursions. Unless stated otherwise, these will start from the John Forrest Roundabout in Kings Park.

If further details of an event are needed, please feel free to contact the RAOU Office on 364 6202 (until notified of the new office's number).

Saturday, December 10, Local Excursion: Canning River, Wilson. Meet at 0800 at the Kent Street 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.

Saturday, January 14, 1984: Forrestdale Lake. Meet at 0800 at the picnic area at the end of Broome Street in Forrestdale. Depending on water levels, we could enjoy crakes or waders or both!

Saturday, January 28: Herdsman Lake. Hear first-hand about the waterbird study centre and see some of the 65 bird species found in this remarkable wetland. Meet in Floreat Waters Estate, Churchlands, at the city end of Lakeside Drive at 0800.

Friday, January 27 — Monday, January 30: Torbay Campout. Members have requested that we repeat the legendary 1982 campout at the Woodbury-Boston Environmental School, near

Torbay Hill (between Albany and Denmark). Our programme will probably include cryptic swampbirds, waders, karri birds and searches for elusive heath-dwellers: also some different sites to those visited in 1982.

Directions.

From Albany . . . take the Elleker/Torbay road to Denmark; after Elleker and the Cosy Corner road, keep a look-out for **Hortins South Road** (also sign-posted 'Torbay Hill') and take that left turn, off the bitumen. Turn right at the first T junction and continue for a total of 3.5 km from the Denmark road, ignoring two bitumen turnoffs to the right. **At the top** of the climb you will see the brown sign 'Woodbury Boston': turn in there (at an angle of about 2 o'clock).

From Denmark . . . take the Torbay bitumen alternative route to Albany and look carefully for the sharp South Hortins turnoff on the right after Bornholm.

The camp-hall offers majestic panoramas of the coast and is completely equipped for our needs. To obtain a place and further details, you will need to **book** (and send \$10) with Diane Beckingham, 101 Park Street, Subiaco 6008, **immediately!** Phone (09) 381 9035.

Saturday, February 4: Thomsons L Nature Reserve. This excellent venue always provides a wide range of bush- and waterbirds. Meet at 0700 at the carpark area on Russell Road, Success. Note early start.

Saturday, February 18: McLarty Lake or vicinity. McLarty L has provided some outstanding birding in the past (e.g. crakes, rare waders, egrets). This day trip will start at 0800 from the intersection of 'Old Bunbury Road' and South-West Highway, approximately 5 km S of Pinjarra (turn right).

SUNDAY, February 26: Wanneroo Lakes. Assemble at 0800 in the Neil Hawkins Reserve, Joondalup (near Wanneroo Shire Offices). Bush birds in tuart woodland followed by waterbirds.

Saturday, March 10: probably Bibra and Yangebup Lakes. Check March newsletter for details: probably starting at 0800 at the 'log boat' on the lawns on the west side of Bibra L.

MEETING REPORTS

Special Meeting No. 1 September 5

Dr. Stephen Davies was unable to attend this meeting and so Roger Jaensch chaired the meeting.

Graeme Chapman captivated us all with a talk on **Photographing Australian Birds** in which he used his photographs to provide a critical analysis of subject matter, composition and other technical details. Some of his points to remember were reducing camera shake with a strong steady tripod, the importance of depth of field, the need to focus on the bird's eye for close-up photographs, being able to know how your film will respond in different light conditions and to know the bird's behaviour in order to anticipate where it will be or what it will do at a particular time.

Graeme used contrasting photographs to show how some photographs could have been improved. The successful photographs were technically brilliant or artistically breathtaking. There were also those appealing photographs which captured the comical behaviour of birds, making them very alive and real to the viewer.

This talk took us throughout Australia, through most bird families and into the subject matter which makes eye-catching bird photographs. We all give our warmest thanks to Graeme for sharing his very special knowledge and experience with us.

Shapelle McNeen

September 26, Jim Lane — "Duck Hunting in Australia"

It was true duck weather on this Monday night, the rain competing with the speakers as it thundered down. Once the business of the meeting was completed, Dr Davies invited Jim Lane, Chief Reserve Management Officer of Fisheries and Wildlife, to talk on **Duck Hunting in Australia**.

Jim presented the areas throughout Australia which have suitable habitat for ducks. Habitats vary from season to season or from year to year depending on how much water is available. Jim explained how the interests of the birds and duck shooting were co-ordinated from the past to the present day in Australia, with special reference to Western Australia.

The most important consideration is that the impact of duck hunting on duck populations be kept to a minimum. To enable this to be under some form of control, restrictions are placed on the duck hunting season. These include the number of duck species available for shooting, the number of reserves opened for duck hunting, the length and timing of the hunting season and a bag limit being imposed. These restrictions take into consideration the knowledge that some duck species are common and others rare, how wet the season has been and the importance of some wetlands as breeding grounds in summer. Within a set number of alternatives the restrictions on duck hunting may vary from year to year. These decisions are based on the water levels of the wetlands for the current season and this data is collected from each of the wetlands every two months.

Jim successfully increased our awareness of the management of duck hunting from the birds' and the shooters' points of view.

EXCURSION AND CAMPOUT REPORTS

August 6, Perry Lakes Half Day Excursion

A 30-strong group met in Kings Park for a pleasant outing at Perry Lakes. We arrived at Perry Lakes at half-past nine and spent half an hour looking at waterbirds on one of the ponds which has a reasonable amount of reeds.

Swamphens, Dusky Moorhens, Coots, Hoary-headed Grebes, Black Ducks, Grey Teal, Hardheads and Musk Ducks were observed at leisure as well as groups of Rainbow Lorikeets in the eucalypts nearby. The Rainbow Lorikeets obviously transit from Kings Park.

At ten o'clock we met with the Bold Park Ranger and started a walk and bird count along the tracks in the reserve. We split into two groups and saw 25 species, including Sittellas, Black-shouldered Kite, White-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Little Wattlebirds.

There was some confusion in the identification of an immature Little Falcon perhaps because we were on the lookout for a Peregrine Falcon that had been reported earlier. The bird seen at very close range was smaller and considerably darker underneath than a Peregrine. Little Falcons Hobbies of the coastal areas tend to be very dark; this was a sub-adult which explains the lead coloured cere and absence of yellow eyering.

Other interesting facts were the complete dominance of the Brown Honeyeater as the most common bird in the area and the observation of a Red Wattlebird eating bees in flight at the mouth of a hive.

J. Hansen

August 20-21: Boyagin-Tutanning Weekend

A group of approximately 20 people gathered at Boyagin Nature Reserve on a rather wet day. Luckily there were enough long breaks in the weather for us to explore one of the large granite outcrops.

Our guide and organiser for the weekend was the Reserve Management Officer at Pingelly, Ken Wallace, who was particularly well versed in the botany of the area. It was interesting to see the geographically restricted plants and trees of the granite outcrops such as Gungurru *Eucalyptus caesia* and Granite Kunzea *Kunzea pulchella*. We then travelled a short distance to some wandoo country, seeing typical wandoo species such as Rufous Treecreepers and Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters. We finally gathered in some laterite country to discuss the day's findings. Some people then returned to Perth but others camped overnight at the edge of the reserve.

On the following day, a smaller group met in Pingelly to visit the Tutanning Nature Reserve. On the way into the centre of the reserve, we stopped to look at an old Malleefowl nest. After an introduction to the area, we explored the various habitats: wandoo, sheoak, heathplain and dryandra country. White-cheeked

and Brown Honeyeaters were particularly widespread and numerous.

Following lunch, the group departed, having enjoyed another great birding weekend. Our thanks to the Pingelly Wildlife Officers for their tremendous help. S. Nevill

August 27, Helena Valley

A group of about 30 members and newcomers turned up at Centrepoint for this local excursion, but through an unfortunate mix-up were without a leader until Joan Seabrook came to the rescue. During our walk through Helena Valley, the majority of those present saw common birds of the heath and woodland habitat. These included several brilliant male Splendid Fairy-wrens, Red-capped Parrots and White-cheeked Honeyeaters. A variety of cuckoos were also heard calling: good comparisons were made between the Golden and Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoos.

R. King

Yallingup Campout, September 6-11

Despite several full days of listening and watching in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste coastal scrubs, our small group led by Roger Jaensch, was unable to report any sign of the presence of Rufous Bristlebirds. At least ten localities were searched from north of Yallingup to south of Boranup. As the coastal heath is extensive, the challenge still remains open to any birdos spending time in the South-West corner. The use of a 4WD vehicle would be an advantage.

We saw 54 species of birds, so there were plenty of rewards for our efforts. Among the highlights were:

1. Painted Button-quail, south of Moses Rock.
2. Three species of cuckoos, often in same vicinity.
3. Red-eared Firetails displaying, with long trailing grass stems in beaks.
4. White-breasted Robin's nest with young, in tea-tree.
5. Southern Emu-wrens at all heath localities.
6. Three Square-tailed Kites at Kilcarnup, one at Ellensbrook, one at Boranup Hill: all quartering low over coastal heath beside the ocean, bar one at the edge of karri.
7. Crested Shrike-tit calling in karri at Boranup.
8. Red-winged and Splendid Fairy-wrens together in Ern West's farmyard south of Cowaramup.

Our accommodation at the Barker property near Yallingup was comfortable and extremely convenient. We were pleased to have the participation of Nell and Vic Pascoe (Williams), Wayne Zadow (Kojonup) and Bill Perryman (Busselton).

D. Beckingham

September 17, Bickley Brook Reservoir

It was a fine Saturday morning when 80 people assembled at Bickley Brook Reservoir. Several groups were formed, some going along the brook while others tackled the steep slopes of marri and jarrah woodland.

A wide range of birds was seen by all, from Maned Duck to Square-tailed Kite and Striated Pardalote. The groups re-assembled at the reservoir for lunch. A total of 46 species of birds was realised from recounting each group's morning of bird-watching. Birds of interest seen included Mistletoebirds, Elegant Parrots, a Scarlet Robin feeding a fledgling, Dusky Woodswallows nest building and Magpie-larks with two young in a nest.

A great time was had by all on this spring day, having flowers and a babbling brook at our feet and the songs of birds all around us. S. McNee

September 18, Mud-wrestling at the RAOU-Alcoa Artificial Wetland Reserve.

On Sunday, September 18, eleven energetic members led by Bob Goodale, met with Dave Kabay (Chief Environmental Officer for Alcoa's South-West area), to plant trees along the banks of a claypit in an attractive and secluded area near Baldivis. Ducks and Pelicans were settled on the water, while Regent Parrots were seen flying overhead.

Some 700 seedlings of *Melaleuca lanceolata* (Black tea-tree) were planted close to the water's edge and we also weeded and dug in fertilizer around the numerous healthy eucalypts already

established by Alcoa. "We would like RAOU members to feel involved and help in the management of the area", said Dave Kabay.

On this fun day we certainly got involved — sinking to the knees in dark, heavy clay. Several trusty gum boots were nearly lost forever in the boggy mess. Thanks to true grit, all survived. We look forward to monitoring the growth of the vegetation and when possible, giving further assistance.

D. Beckingham

September 24: Pelican Point and Alfred Cove

An enthusiastic crowd of about 60 new and familiar birdos gathered at the Pelican Point lookout for an afternoon excursion. A crack team of leaders took small groups to different parts of the reserve, giving helpful advice to students from Stephen Davies' UWA course. The most interesting finds were a Common Tern in partial breeding plumage (rare to see this species in the SW, let alone in breeding colours) and a Great Egret with complete breeding colours including blue-green facial skin.

Most of the mob continued, through early America's Cup revellers, around the estuary to Alfred Cove. Observers were amazed to see this valuable area's attractions, especially the Buff-banded Rails, and Grey Plovers sporting black fronts.

R. J.

Campout in the Fitzgerald River National Park September 29 - October 5, 1983

If numbers were the criterion of success, the annual campout was massively successful, with at least forty-nine people participating at various times during the week.

On the other hand, if we believe that success lies in the venue it was no less a triumph because the FRNP is a magnificent site. The Twertup Field Study Centre is perched on unique spongelite cliffs overlooking a massive breakaway, which made getting up in the morning a positive joy. Add to that a great variety of wildflowers (especially the Royal Hakeas and Qualup Bells), wild heath, dense mallee scrub and tall riverine Yate forest and you begin to perceive the splendour of the park. Of course the roads were appalling, the range of spiders, ticks, caterpillars and bull ants (all of which showered upon us in the sheep cage as we battered our way down the ribbonlike tracks) astounding, but these only added to the pleasure (??) as did the kangaroos and goanans that were frequently seen.

We were specifically seeking the Ground Parrot, the Western Bristlebird and the Western Whipbird but here we were less successful. The Western Whipbird was seen on four occasions and heard frequently. The Bristlebird may have been seen once and heard once. In spite of our strenuous, protracted early morning efforts, the Ground Parrot was not seen at all, although it was heard at three of the listening posts. We all came to appreciate the calls of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater!

On the credit side we located a total of 101 species with at least 14 of these breeding. Breeding discoveries included the finding of a single Bustard's egg (damaged), an Emu's nest in thick ti-tree scrub (6 eggs), an active Malleefowl mound near our campsite and a Calamanthus (Field Wren) nest with two young, exquisitely constructed on the ground in low heath.

The birds seen would have been rated in importance amongst us according to whether we'd seen them before or not, but those ratable at any level included the Yellow-nosed Albatross offshore near the mouth of the Fitzgerald River and the beautiful Square-tailed Kites, seen in several localities. Wedge-tailed Eagles were widespread and five were circling together near Roes Rock, while a pair of Peregrine Falcons were probably breeding at a cliff site. Two sightings of Malleefowl were exciting as was the viewing of that equally frustrating bird, the Painted Button-quail. Nesting Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes were enjoyed by all but only two observers were fortunate to catch sight of a Chestnut Quail-thrush. 'Maluridaephiles' were delighted to find Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens and Southern Emu-wrens, while those entranced by the secretive Shy Hylacola and Calamanthus saw them in several places. Others that rate quick mention (at least) were Western Spinebills, Yellow-rumped Pardalotes (several nests near the camp), and the lovely Red-eared Firetails.

In closing this report I must thank all those involved in the planning of the campout, the 4WD jockeys, who went far beyond

the second mile, the planners and perpetrators of the communal meal — party, the Newbeys, and our beloved leader for that wild final drive, from those in the cage. Brice Wells

October 15, Walyunga National Park

In the cool of the early morning, on October 15, 1983, thirty members and friends met at the Long Pool in the Walyunga National Park.

The group was advised that the National Parks Authority of Western Australia had no official list of birds for the Walyunga Park.

It was therefore suggested that an objective of the outing could be the development of a bird list, as the basis of a submission to the National Parks Authority.

In the trees near the water's edge, Scarlet Robins were nesting and 'courtship-feeding'; fourteen other species were also sighted in nesting and courtship during the morning.

Towards the falls, the number of species increased, and included a White-faced Heron concealed amongst the branches of a dead tree, a Tawny Frogmouth well disguised sitting on a nest, and the nosy White-winged Triller.

On the hillside, several Rainbow Bee-eaters were sighted scraping nest holes, many Tree Martins were busily nesting and the elusive Shining Bronze-Cuckoo made an appearance, much to the delight of the group.

The bird-list, compiled from the sightings of the group, totalled 43 species (plus a Splendid Fairy-wren heard once but not sighted).

John Taylor

October 29-30: Karakin/'Samphire'/Crackers Swamp Weekend

Lots of nests and young birds proved to the 25 people who came on this trip that spring had certainly sprung. The weekend began with strawberries for breakfast near Guilderton (Moore River) and our first bird search was at the flowering heath and sandpits on K. W. Road near Lancelin. The 'advertised' Calamanthus and Emu-wrens were seen as well as White-backed Swallows and numerous honeyeaters.

North Karakin Lake still held plenty of water and it supported a multitude of birds including Pacific Herons, Rufous Night Herons (13), Yellow-billed Spoonbills (11), Straw-necked Ibises soaring overhead, Gull-billed Terns (rare in the South-West) and brightly coloured 'tame' Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. A Little Eagle was seen at its nest in a tall marri overlooking the lake.

In the evening we adjourned to Diane Beekingham's 'Samphire Bird Sanctuary' on Wanerie Road and proceeded to explore it. This absorbing spot hosts a wide range of waterbirds and bushbirds including performing Blue-billed Ducks, nesting Little Black Cormorants, noisy Restless Flycatchers, nesting Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes and resident Reed Warblers. Many thanks to Diane for her hospitality: a great social occasion as well as good birding!

Regan's Ford was the first venue on Sunday and it provided a good display of breeding birds such as Rainbow Bee-eaters and Striated Pardalotes. After a relaxing lunch in the balmy sunshine we shifted to the Crackers Swamp Nature Reserve, just a few kilometres to the North-West. While Roger investigated access tracks with his fearless Kingswood, the party enjoyed several pairs of Crimson Chats (one nest with two eggs in a stunted shrub beside a firebreak), and a Black-faced Woodswallow's nest with young (in a tall Dryandra shrub).

Crackers Swamp was easily reached by filing through pristine Banksia woodland. Extensive flooding had filled the wetland to a record level and Blue-billed Ducks had taken up territory as well as Hardheads and Pink-eared Ducks (both with chicks). Spoonbills and Hoary-headed Grebes also had 'that look in their eyes'.

As we were leaving the area, ever-sharp Simon Nevill spied a tiny Baillon's Crake in light rushes under paperbarks fringing a roadside marsh. This gave enthusiastic 'wetfoots' their last opportunity to get wet feet and they were rewarded with close views of the bird and its nest (empty) in a frail inundated shrub. A stripey-headed Hoary-headed Grebe chick piped for its parents nearby.

It was indeed a memorable weekend, with warm thanks to the

four leaders and organisers, but it was an hour too short because of daylight saving!

R. van Delft, C. Lewis, D. Beekingham

NB Members wishing to visit Karakin should first check with the RAOU Office and then ring Mr. Wood (095 781061) as his property surrounds the lake.

Follow that bird!

Woodanilling Campout, Nov. 5-6.

Thirty-five visitors from Perth, Busselton, Williams, Kojonup, Esperance, Ongerup, Toodyay, Dumbleyung, and Arthur River were led by Ray Garstone, local farmer, naturalist and bird photographer on what proved to be a 'five-star' excursion. With Ray's expert help we recorded the sighting of 92 species of birds for the two days and 43 of these were observed to be nesting. The areas covered were the Woodanilling Golf Course, the Rifle Range and gravel pits, and Lake Miripin (20 km to the West), so these are impressive records for a relatively small area.

"Follow that bird!" Ray called out excitedly on seeing a Brown-headed Honeyeater carrying nesting material. At this point we had already seen over thirty nests in the white gums and other trees on the Golf Course, but many more were found after the Sunday trip to small lakes west of the town and to the lake reserve adjoining Trevor Willcox's farm.

We had the thrill of observing many birds sitting on nests: Bronzewings, Dusky Woodswallows, Black-faced Woodswallows, Red-capped Robins, Black-capped Sittellas, a Restless Flycatcher and a Tawny Frogmouth. A White-winged Triller's nest was seen with one young. Bee-eaters' nesting holes were noted in the bunkers on the Golf Course and the tiny, exposed nests of the Jacky Winters amazed us. With a ladder we checked a Collared Sparrowhawk's nest and found it to have three eggs.

Owing to heavy rains this year, numerous waterbirds were nesting as the water levels receded. Eggs were observed in nests of the Hoary-headed Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Black Swan, Coot, Red-capped Plover, Red-kneed Dotterel and Black-winged Stilt.

Ray ended the Saturday evening discussion by producing one more surprise, this time from a cardboard box. It was a baby Brushtail Possum which delighted us all, especially the children.

For the frequent sightings of Regent Parrots and the prolific nature of the bird and plant life, this excursion will be unforgettable. D. Beekingham

November 12, Wungong Gorge

Some of the WA Group's field trips are outstandingly successful. Most are very good, by any standard. Just a few are a bit dull. But this one wasn't nearly that good.

Hardly had the leader finished his preamble when people started to leave. A couple of hundred metres up the track, a Brown Goshawk circled low overhead, but not even that could make everyone happy. By 9.30 half the party had turned for home. By the time people were due to assemble and discuss their observations, the Gorge was deserted.

Someone saw a White-breasted Robin and someone else a Sacred Kingfisher.

Trips like this make all the others so worthwhile. Remember the morning they used a helicopter to dry out the WACA oval? PJC

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

1. News

While Di and I attended the Warden's Conference at Rotamah Syd Baker looked after Eyre. Syd always does a lot of work for which I never seem to find the time, and Eyre is better for his labours.

In July, Tony Milewski and ten WAIT Outside Club members carried out a series of most interesting transects, covering sixty metres on each side of the entrance track for 2 kilometres north of the observatory. Their results tend to confirm our estimates of the densities of birds in the mallee.

They were replaced by Stephen Hopper and the eight botanists attending the Botany Course, amongst whom were old friends

of Eyre, Joan Seabrook and Barbara and Margaret Evans. The Eyre list of plants will have to be rewritten when all their specimens have been identified!

The months of **August and September** were busy; 298 visitor nights were recorded, with September's total of 208 being a record for any single month. Suki's renovated engine was successfully installed, with its assortment of wires and hoses being slowly sorted out from the manual. The septic tank serving the toilets had to be emptied, as the build up of solids had become too great. A Warden's life is not always a happy one!

The **banding course** was fully booked, with fifteen students, Perry and ourselves making a household of eighteen. It was good to welcome back Mary, Joyce and Mara from previous banding courses and Peter and Wendy on their third visit. With Perry and Alma they made a core of expertise and produced the elements of fun, which with Di's cooking made the Course something to remember. Some 289 birds were caught, of which 116 (40%) were retraps, which is not unusual in the context of banding in a limited area. Five birds banded at Eyre were recovered at Twilight Cove (our first recoveries at Twilight), reinforcing those recovered by Don Reid at the Nine Mile track and establishing a western movement of honeyeaters, with the blossom. The course should have a more important result as it will probably produce five new B Class banders. Since the end of June, more than 600 birds have been banded at Eyre.

The **Honeyeater Course** was attended by five people. Dr. Brian Collins gave up much to lead this course. The nectar flow in flowers of *Eucalyptus diversifolia* and *E. angulosa (incrassata)* was measured in the early morning, at noon and in the evening, demonstrating the decreasing rate of flow during the day. It was also found that the nectar flow in *E. diversifolia* (the inflorescence of which was nearing its end), was much less than that of the *E. angulosa* just coming into flower. Results from a transect count along the east track were very similar to those obtained in the weekly point counts.

The course on **nests and territories** was rather shaded by six out of eight participants cancelling. The seventeen nests found reached a climax with the discovery on the last day of nests of a Chestnut Quail-thrush and a Tawny Frogmouth, the latter with two well-grown young. Besides giving the opportunity for close-up photography, the Frogmouth allowed me to pick her up from the nest so that she and her young could be banded. Territories held by Red-capped Plovers along five kilometres of the beach were plotted and found to agree to a great extent with the counts made over this stretch each week.

Don and Donna Reid looked after Eyre while Di and I were on leave and had a distinguished visitor, an Antarctic or Dove Prion, while they were here. Bill Peach was also at Eyre filming for the ABC as part of a documentary on John Eyre and a visit by members of a S.A. ornithological touring group, rounded off a great month.

Migratory waders are beginning to come in. So far the large Sand Plover, Grey Plover, Common Sandpiper, Greenshank, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Sanderling have all been seen, and last evening our first tattler arrived. Numbers are bulding up to a climax in early November. The first moult records are also appearing.

We are very thankful to SERIWA's Board of Management in making the allocation of the **Monkhouse Solar Power unit** to the observatory. With the solar powered telephone to be installed, hopefully in December, the Old Telegraph Station will move right in to the modern age of technology.

To the friends of Eyre, temporary wardens Syd Baker and Don and Donna Reid and all our other well-wishers we give our **thanks**. Suki is also most grateful.

2. Courses

December/January. Except for the period of the work party (see below), this period is for those wishing to spend their holidays at Eyre. Families are welcome. The weather is pleasant during the summer, with few hot days. Eyre is an unforgettable experience.

January

Work party — dune stabilisation. The work will consist of the collection of seed and the

planting of *Spinifex hirsutus* and *Euphobia paralias* under nets. Fees will be reduced to \$8.50 per day for adults and \$4.50 for children under the age of fourteen, plus the appropriate transport charges.

13-26 May

Bird Banding and Bird Diets. This will be a combined course, the section on Bird Diets being led by Dr. Mike Calver and the Bird Banding by Perry de Rebeira and Peter Congreve. During the course it is planned to spend some time in camp at Eucla or Mundrabilla to check the movement of birds east of Eyre. Dr. Mike Calver will demonstrate methods of sampling what the birds caught have been eating. The fees will be \$95.00 for one week of six nights or \$190.00 for the full thirteen nights. Persons under 16 will not be accepted.

26 August -
1 September

Botany. Dr. Neville Marchant will lead this course, which will be a continuation of the course of July 1983 set in a different season. The enthusiastic support given by amateur botanists on that course did much to obtain the good collections of plants made. Their continued support is sought for this work.

2-8 September

Reptiles. The course which is the second on this subject will be led by Dr. Mike Bamford. The methods of catching reptiles in the field, their measurement in the hand and how to identify them and record them will be demonstrated. Our lizards are a fascinating section of the life in the mallee. Last January, during Mary Dyer's course 125 individuals were caught (belonging to eighteen species), measured and released.

16-29 September

Field Ornithology. This will be the fifth course on this subject. It will again be led by Dr. Stephen Davies assisted by the Warden. The course will include mist netting as a means of studying birds in the hand, census techniques and counting birds, nests and territories and the interpretation of data gathered. However, the subject matter may be changed to match the changing weather pattern at the time of the course.

28 October -
3 November

Shore Birds. Peter Curry and the Warden. The influx of migratory waders to the beach near Eyre reaches a peak during the last week of October and the first week of November.

WADER STUDY GROUP

With the arrival of large numbers of migratory waders on the Swan Estuary and elsewhere, at the end of September, the Wader Study Group swung into action after the long and virtually waderless months of winter. The monthly counts, started at over twenty sites across W.A. (but mostly around Perth) in July, began to record large number of birds, while banding activities recommenced.

The first three banding excursions to **Pelican Point** yielded only small numbers of birds, although these included the rarely caught Grey Plover and a Common Tern, a species not often encountered around Perth. To improve our early-season captures, a cannon netting exercise on the **Freeway Foreshore** was organized in early October. This resulted in the capture of 216 birds, 215 of these being Red-necked Stints and the odd bird being a Red-capped Plover. As expected for so early in the season, most (193) of the stints were adult birds, many of them with marked breeding plumage. Only three juvenile birds and fifteen second year birds were caught. More of a surprise was the number of already-banded birds caught; 34 or 16% of the capture. We think that all of these were our own birds from this or previous seasons, although not all have been traced as yet.

Such a high proportion of **recaptures** is truly remarkable and it is now possible to readily spot banded birds in the flocks of

stints and Curlew Sandpipers at Alfred Cove. We hope to be able to repeat the success at the Freeway Foreshore in future months, so we will be able to rapidly increase the number of banded birds on the estuary and, hopefully, the number of our birds picked up elsewhere.

A timetable of Wader Study Group activities has been produced and copies of this will be available at RAOU meetings. However, trips listed may not always happen, while other trips, like those to the Freeway Foreshore, do not appear on this schedule as they will be decided upon at short notice. Therefore, interested people should keep in touch with Mike Bamford on 367 3032 (h) or 332 2468 (w), although he is frequently in the field and therefore unobtainable. Doug Watkins can now be contacted on 364 6202 (that's right, Roger's number!) but may move before the end of the year.

P.S. Many thanks to the counters who are sending in such interesting data and if you need more record sheets, please contact one of us.

SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by RAOU Field Officer, Roger Jaensch

1. Little Bitterns in Perth

The Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* is perhaps better known in the South-West than in most other parts of Australia. No doubt the abundance of suitable habitat within the Perth metropolitan area has influenced this situation. Indeed, four of the seven South-West 10' blocks in which Little Bitterns were found during the Atlas, were in the Perth area.

Cryptic plumage and behaviour have contributed to the scarcity of reports of Little Bitterns in the SWWP so far. However, familiarity with the calls of this species will greatly increase chances of finding it. Calls are given by males (only?), typically within 30 minutes either side of sunset (and presumably similarly at dawn), and most reliably during calm conditions. At certain times (peak of courtship?), calls may be heard in the morning and afternoon.

Guide to Little Bittern calls (see also W.A. Bird Notes 23, Sept. 82: p. 5)

- written as: "orr orr orr . . ." or "kohr kohr kohr . . ."
- quality and style: guttural; directional and mechanical.
- sounds like: frog, or distant dog barks, or heavy wood-sawing.
- volume: variable; carries up to 100 m at best; deceptive.
- syllables: 8-12, between one and two per second.
- frequency: intervals between call-sets of 10 to 30 seconds.

Recent investigations by myself and others at wetlands (mostly reserves) in the greater metropolitan area have revealed the following Little Bitterns (all males — some presumably, some positively):

- 1, 24/10, Thomsons L., in *Baumea articulata* (twig-rush).
- 1, 2/11, Forrestdale L., in *Baumea* and *Melaleuca*.
- 1, 6/11, Herdsman L., mist-netted in *Typha*.
- 3, 10/11, Jandabup L., in *Baumea* — all within 100 m.

Patient observers might find Little Bitterns calling at other Perth wetlands in the period October-November (into January on the south coast): note that birds may not call for long on a particular night. The only common denominator in habitat seems to be tall beds or patches of reeds (often over 1.5 m), usually dense and with collapsed or dead material within.

2. Expose: Blue billed Duck *Oxyura australis*.

The Blue-billed Duck is a diving duck, essentially occurring on deeper 'fresh' waters of the South-West coastal fringe. In dry seasons or years, Blue-billed Ducks are absent or scarcely seen at wetlands of the inland Narrogin and Wongan-Tammin regions. However, when wetlands are filled with 1-2 metres of relatively 'fresh' water (up to about 3 p.p.t. salinity), pairs, parties or occasionally flocks of Blue-billed Ducks appear in this region.

Data for the 1983-84 season has included many locality records for the Blue-billed Duck that are 'firsts' for the SWWP.

eg. Jurien-Gingin region — Eneminga Sw (1 bird), Crackers Sw (3), Nambung L (1).

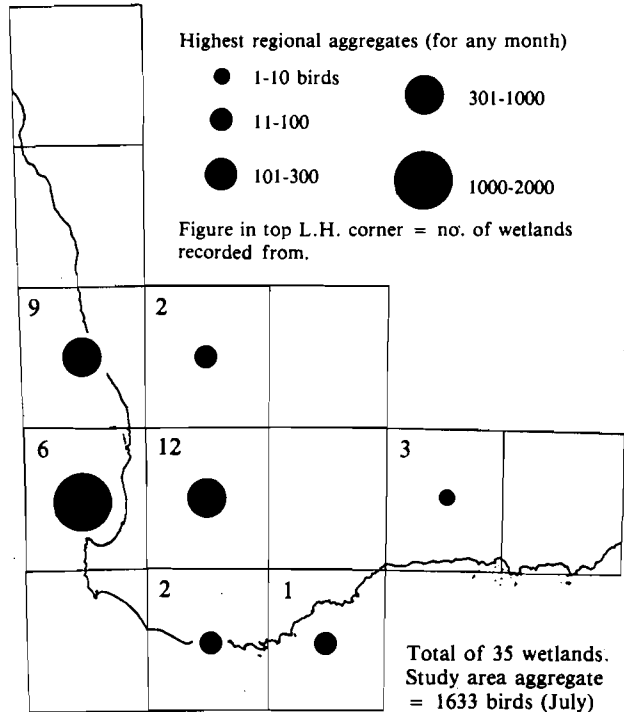
Narrogin region — Yealering L (4), Taarblin L (15), Nomans L (2), Dumbleyung L (1), Coblinine R (4), Wardering L (2), Beaufort R (2).

All results to hand indicate that the largest concentrations occur in late autumn, winter and sometimes early spring.

eg. recently — 80, 4/7, Flagstaff L; 370, 17/7, Towerrinning L; 1200, 16/7, Peel Inlet. These are saltier wetlands.

A summary of distribution of birds recorded in the SWWP is presented on the accompanying map.

BLUE-BILLED DUCK



3. Dull wetlands can become exciting!

A number of observers studying small, seemingly insignificant wetlands in Great Southern districts were surprised (and certainly pleased!) at the changes that occurred after the floods of January 1982. Similarly, other wetlands have been revitalised in 1983-4, some to rare depths.

Changes which have attracted new species and/or greater numbers of birds to feed/or breed include:

- a. reduced salinity of water (different feed-types);
- b. greater depth of water (a. & b. may be related factors);
- c. greater area of water (more 'safe' nest sites);
- d. more nest sites, due to b. & c. (eg. flooded shrub canopies);
- e. Longer retention of water (allows certain feed organisms to develop).

Examples of changes in waterbird usage are Musk Ducks breeding at Yaalup Lagoon and Lake Bryde, a host of heron-types and ducks breeding at Taarblin Lake and Crackers Swamp, and Whiskered Terns and breeding grebes occurring at Altham Lake.

4. Expose: Towerrinning Lake

Wayne Zadow and Roger Crouch have completed twelve months of two-monthly surveys at Towerrinning Lake and its adjacent swamps and between them have accounted for 42 species, 13 of them breeding. A graph accompanying this note, shows a close correlation between changes recorded in total numbers of all species and number of species, for 'North-West' Swamp, adjoining Towerrinning Lake.

Whereas the lake-proper is mostly open water (30 species, 2 breeding), NW Swamp is partly timbered and shallower (36 species, 6 breeding). Consequently, deeper-water species such as Great Crested Grebes (max. of 14 in lake, 4 in NWS) and Blue-

