



Western Australian Bird Notes

NUMBER 29
MARCH 1984

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

RAOU Office in W.A.: Suite 30, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road (South), Canning Bridge W.A., 6156. Telephone: (09) 364 6202
CHAIRMAN: Dr. S.J.J.F. Davies, "Waters Upton", Mt. Helena, 6555.
SECRETARY: Mrs. J. Seabrook, 15 Rabone Way, Boya, 6056. Ph. 299 6816.
EDITOR: Roger Jaensch, Field Officer, RAOU Office in W.A.

SNIPE SNEAK INTO SOUTH OF STATE

The genus *Gallinago* comprises the true snipe (not to be confused with Painted Snipe) and has seven species all of which breed only in the northern hemisphere. Three of these have been recorded in Australia: Latham's Snipe *G. hardwickii*, (eastern Australia), Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* (northern Australia including the Kimberley) and Pin-tailed Snipe *G. stenura* (Pilbara).

Unfortunately, the *Gallinago* snipe are all remarkably similar in appearance. The three species occurring in Australia are particularly difficult to distinguish in the field and most observers should **not attempt identification** to species level. Identity largely rests on number, shape and patterns of tail feathers, although subtle differences in size and wing patterns and general habitat preferences may be useful. To further add to the confusion, the Common Snipe *G. gallinago* should not be ignored as it could easily occur in Australia, being fairly common in parts of Southern Asia.

Prior to 1984, there had been **no records** of *Gallinago* snipe in the South-West. In fact the nearest localities for snipe were the northern Pilbara coast (specimens of Pin-tailed) and at least one isolated occurrence of a *Gallinago* snipe in the Gascoyne basin. Observers familiar with snipe have been looking out for these birds in apparently suitable South-West freshwater marshes for many years. **Suitable habitat** can in fact vary from rank grassland to sparsely vegetated mud flat or lush floating plant rafts!

On Sunday 29 January 1984, a number of RAOU observers (Watkins, Parish *et al*) had repeated views of a *Gallinago* snipe at **Lake Seppings** in Albany. The bird was flushed from pockets of shore with a little mud adjacent to grass and reeds and it flew in typical strong, weaving snipe-like style. It was seen by other observers on the two following days. Little could be said to identify the bird other than that it had the proportionately long bill and small, squat body of *Gallinago* snipe. One sharp raspy call was heard by R. Jaensch who thought that the call was not typical of Latham's Snipe.

Another snipe was flushed from collapsed beds of rush *Baumea articulata* at **McLarty Lake** near Coolup on 12 February 1984. The rapidly drying lake had exposed mud flats near the reeds which still enclosed some water and sloppy mud. During the RAOU excursion on 18 February, this bird was again observed in the same habitat area.

No specific identity could be given to the McLarty bird. However it was thought that it was **smaller** than a Latham's Snipe and that **calls** were somehow different. The question of identify will probably not be solved until a bird is inspected in the hand.

Although we might expect Pin-tailed Snipe to sometimes **wander** further south than the North-West (especially if cyclones are in effect), we cannot discount Latham's Snipe or other *Gallinago* species. The eastern rather than northern subspecies of the Masked Lapwing occurs occasionally in the South-West, so movement of birds between the SE and SW corners of Australia is certainly feasible.

Colonization of the South-West by snipe could be a long-term consequence of land clearance in the South-West. Paddocks with winter and spring marshes have now replaced paperbark swamps and wet heathland which would not have been suitable for snipe. Furthermore, **grazing** by stock, clearing and reduced water levels because of drainage and diversion of water have converted heavily-vegetated wetlands to more open swamps suitable for snipe to feed and shelter in.



No, this is **not** a snipe, but an **Asian Dowitcher**, captured by the North-West Wader Expedition in November 1983! Although snipe and dowitchers have rather similar bills, snipe inhabit freshwater swamps while dowitchers feed on coastal mudflats. The Asian Dowitcher is one of the **rarest waders** in the world and this is the first photograph to be published of this species 'in the hand'.

PHOTO BY DUNCAN PARISH

A BASE FOR THE W.A. GROUP

With the rapidly increasing membership and additional responsibilities of the W.A. Group of the RAOU, it has become necessary to establish a 'permanent' base in Perth. The previous arrangement of the W.A. Group sharing the facilities of the Waterbird Project Office in the Field Officer's spare bedroom had become untenable!

Since Monday 13 February, the RAOU has occupied premises at —

Suite 30, Rowleys Centre
15 Ogilvie Road (South)
Canning Bridge W.A. 6153
Phone (09) 364 6202

The Office is quite spacious, modern, air-conditioned (!), well lit and convenient to undercover, street and vacant-lot parking and it even affords occasional views of passing cormorants and pelicans! The cost of renting the room is \$42 per week plus rates and there should be ample room for the Waterbirds Field Officer, his Assistant, the Ground Parrot Officer and occasionally the RAOU Director, Stephen Davies.

Members are encouraged to call and see RAOU staff whenever necessary. The Ogilvie Road turnoff is on the left immediately in front of the pedestrian overpass after crossing Canning Bridge from Perth and the office is on the first level in the new part of the Rowleys Centre complex. Visitors from Fremantle should turn right at Sleat Road, take the first left and then left again into Ogilvie Road.

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR 1984

- Mar. 10—Local excursion, Bibra & Yangebup Lakes.
- Mar. 26—Meeting, U.W.A., Peter Curry: Muttonbirds.
- Mar. 30—Apr. 1—CAMPOUT, Wellington Mills.
- Apr. 8—Day Trip, Mandurah — Coodanup — Serpentine R.
- May 5—Local excursion, Neerabup Nat. Park.
- May 7—Meeting, U.W.A., Review of recent RAOU activities.
- June 9—Day Trip, Guraga & Wannamal Lakes.
- June 25—Meeting, U.W.A., Mike Brooker.
- Aug. 6—Meeting, U.W.A., Plans for 1984-5 activities.

COMING MEETINGS

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).

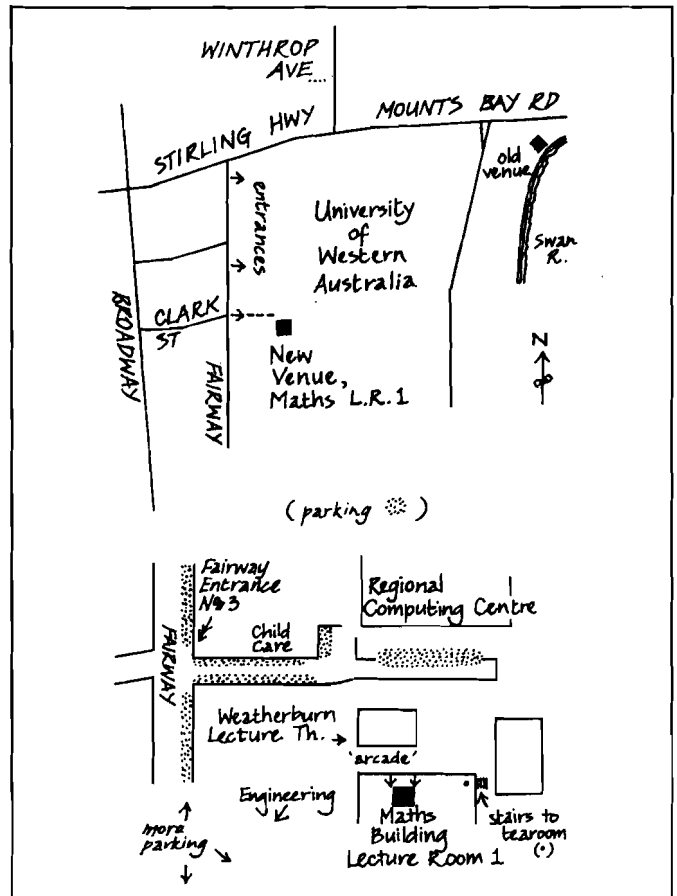
Meetings commence at 8.00 p.m. and include tea and biscuits afterwards. Visitors are especially welcome.

Monday, March 26: Peter Curry — Muttonbirds

Are you aware of the incredible life history of the Short-tailed Shearwater, reputed to be one of the world's most numerous migrants? Peter Curry will tell us about Dom Serventy's comprehensive study of these birds at our regular March meeting.

Monday, May 7: 'What we've discovered in the past 12 months'

The Meetings Sub-Committee of the W.A. Group has recommended that the Group should hold six meetings each year: three with invited speakers and three based on discussion of activities of the RAOU in W.A. On May 7, our first study/discussion meeting will be held, with illustrated reports from bird study projects in W.A. These will include Doug Watkins/Mike Bamford on **wader banding** and counting, Steve Keeling on **Reed Warbler trapping**, Shapelle McNee on **waterbird counting** and possibly some surprise speakers! We hope to close the main part of the meeting by about 9.30 so that members can **mix and chat** longer over tea and biscuits.



Monday, June 25: Mike Brooker

Mike has joined the CSIRO Rangelands and Wildlife research staff at Helena Valley this year. He has worked in the past with **Wedge-tailed Eagles** on the Nullarbor and more recently with waterbirds at the **Macquarie Marshes** in N.S.W. and **Kakadu National Park** in Arnhem Land. At this meeting Mike will speak about aspects of his work in one of these fields.

Monday, August 6: 'What lies ahead'

Our second study/discussion meeting for the year will concentrate on projects and activities over the coming twelve months. The main subject will be **Ground Parrot** searches and **campouts** connected with that project.

COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

Keep an eye on the 'Where to go' column in Friday's *West Australian* for impromptu excursions. Unless otherwise stated, these will start from the John Forrest Roundabout in Kings Park.

If further details of an event are needed, please feel free to ring the RAOU office from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on 364 6202.

CAMPOUT — Friday, March 30 to Sunday, April 1: Wellington Mills

We have booked four Department of Youth Sport and Recreation chalets at Wellington Mills (via Dardanup, south-west of Collie, 192 km from Perth) for two nights: **Friday 30th and Saturday 31st March** and hope to look at local bush birds, as well as waterbirds on Leschenault Inlet.

- * Cost is \$10 per person.
- * Be self-sufficient for food (utensils, gas stoves, fridges provided.)
- * Ten persons per chalets. Bring sleeping bag.
- * Department Rules: sorry **NO** tents or campervans. sorry **NO** pets, no alcohol.
- * Barbecues may be used. Swimming in river.

Please book a place with Organiser Diane on 381 9035: send \$10 on or before 26 March. No bookings or refunds will be arranged after this date.

Best time to ring: 5 p.m. - 8 p.m., weekdays.
Post cheques to D. Beckingham, 101 Park Street, Subiaco.

Sunday, April 8: Mandurah — Coodanup — Serpentine R.

Meet at 0800 on the side of the bitumen road to Coodanup (Coodanup is on the shores of Peel Inlet), just south of where it leaves the main Pinjarra — Mandurah Road. Look for the Coodanup sign on your right, soon after Mandurah, if travelling from Perth to Pinjarra via the Rockingham Road. Probable itinerary: Creery Island area (*Little Egrets, Regent Parrots*); Serpentine River wetlands (a new area for RAOU excursions); Mandurah Seawall (*Roseate Terns*). Full day; total return distance from Perth G.P.O. approximately 180 km.

Saturday, May 5: Neerabup National Park and swamps near the Yanchep Road

Meet near the intersection of Scenic Drive and Ariti Avenue in Wanneroo (beside Joondalup L.) at 0900. We will endeavour to compile a bird list for parts of Neerabup National Park and may augment this with looks at small reed swamps near the Yanchep Road.

Saturday, June 9: Guraga and Wannamal

Meet at 0900 at the Chittering Store, between Muchea and Bindoon on the Great Northern Highway (65 km from Perth G.P.O.). We will proceed to look for Freckled Ducks at Chittering and Wannamal Lakes; later moving to the elusive but worthwhile Guraga Lake if we have enough 4WD vehicles (or Kingswoods)! Full day trip with return distance of approximately 350 km from G.P.O. Contact RAOU office if transport is needed.

The RAOU is looking for a suitable venue for a campout in the Northcliffe area. Anyone knowing of a property or contact person can write to or ring the RAOU office in Canning Bridge. We are interested in visiting in the Spring of 1984 and would require space for approximately 20 car-loads of campers.

The June Newsletter should give details of all campouts and excursions up to 31 December 1984.

MEETING REPORTS

Special Meeting No.2, 28 November 1983: Bert & Babs Wells "Let's Go Wild"

The tremendous popularity of recent meetings has continued: at least 100 people attended the November 28 presentation by Bert and Babs Wells. A professionally-prepared audio-visual entitled "Let's Go Wild" took us through the times and travels of these two well-known natural history photographers.

Combining information, artistic expression and humour, Bert and Babs held their audience spell-bound with a great diversity of slides illustrating their equipment and the places they had been to. Of the numerous bird shots, some of the most enthralling were the high-speed flash shots of birds in flight.

3 December 1983: Annual Social Night

Thanks largely to the inspired organisation of Steven Keeling and Shapelle McNee, a flock of 140 members attended the enormously successful inaugural outdoor RAOU Social Night. Blessed by perfect evening weather and a pleasant lawn setting at W.A.I.T., those who gathered for the feast were treated to sumptuous fillet steak, lashings of bacon and onion and juicy fruit salad with cream (washed down with a selection of fine wines!).

Chit-chat was readily forthcoming as many members staggered to the event straight from the Bird Tally (see report elsewhere). Entertainment was provided by the antics of Keeling, Curry and crew announcing the bird species recorded in the Tally. Expensive prizes were awarded liberally: some were binoculars and paintings, others were bird posters.

All who came to the party went home satisfied with the fun, food and fellowship and we all look forward to the 1984 show!

6 January 1984: AGM

The Annual General Meeting had a very warm reception with about 40 people in attendance. The activities of the Group were reviewed and summarized by Stephen Davies. In summary the W.A. Group had a very successful year in 1983. Discussion from the floor was vigorous with topics such as involving more young people in the Group and the possibility of hiring a Mini-bus for some day or weekend excursions. The meeting closed at 9.20 p.m.

Office-bearers for 1984 (as at February 29) are:

- Chairman: Dr. Stephen Davies
- Vice-Chairman: Ros Denny
- Secretary: Joan Seabrook
- Treasurer: Dan Drake
- Extra members: Clive Napier, Brian Collins, Shapelle McNee, Bob Goodale and Jack Donohoe.

EXCURSION REPORTS

26 November 1983: Coo loongup Lake and Claypits

A small but resolute band of observers gathered on this very hot day to look at waterbirds in the Baldviss area. Results were not overly inspiring at first but Doug Watkins guided the group to tuart woodland at the north end of Coo loongup Lake where Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters proved to be quite an exciting find (not often seen on the coastal plain). After a protracted visit to the delicatessen, the stayers looked at the RAOU-Alcoa Claypits Reserve, which now attracts a fair variety of cormorants, heron-types and ducks.

2-3 December: Metropolitan 24-Hr Tally Hunt

A diverse array of vehicle-loads of observers constituted no less than 21 teams of entrants for this pre- Annual Dinner/Barbecue special event.

The object was for each team to locate as many species as possible within the bounds of the Perth metropolitan region, between 1900 hrs on Friday evening and the same hour on Saturday, 3 December. Teams made their own choices of starting points, while everyone finished, at least we think they did, at the barbecue venue in Bentley.

During the course of a memorable day, teams repeatedly crossed tracks around favourite birding spots, sometimes being careful to contrive expressions of doom and despair and to mutter 'not much about today' on their way out from the place where they had just seen fifty or more species.

The Results

Not counting the valiant efforts of one family team, who had only the time to glance up occasionally as they ran around preparing the way for the beautiful barbecue that awaited us all, teams did extremely well. They chose a wide variety of bush locations to track down the dryland species and the most popular was actually Kings Park (wonder why??) which was visited by four teams. Among wetlands, Pelican Point was the most popular site for a flying visit, being visited by ten teams. Among others, Herdsman was visited by nine, Alfred Cove by seven, and Bibra, Forrestdale and Thomson lakes each by six teams.

Even the unluckiest crew managed 43 species. The average find was 77, and no less than seven teams noted 90 species or over the best three were as follows:

Team	Key localities visited	Species total
Stephen Ambrose	Penguin I., L. Coo loongup	96
David Doust	Wellard, Jarrahdale,	
Bob & Ann Goodale	Herdsman, L. Claremont	
Mandy Silberstein	North Mole.	
Perry & Alma de Rebeira	Two Rocks, Yanchep N.P.,	100
Geoff Shannon	Herdsman, L. Monger L.,	
Peter Southern	Pelican Point, John F. N.P.	

Norma Duff
Peel Howden
Bill & Karen McRoberts
Duncan Parish

Bickley res., Alfred Cove
Booragoon, Bibra,
Yangebup, Thomson &
Forrestdale Lakes,
Rockingham, Pt. Peron

101

To find a hundred species in Perth on a day when the easterlies blew incessantly, keeping songs and calls down and making many bush-birds harder to find, is no mean feat. A prize for correctly guessing the **total number of species found by all teams combined, 161**, was just deserve to Ron van Delft for such inspired insight.

Highlights for various teams included Emu, Australasian and Little Bitterns, Reef Heron, Square-tailed Kite, Peregrine, Terek Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater and Rufous Songlark.

And the ones we all missed? There were quite a few. It's not difficult to explain why no one could find, for example, emu-wrens on a windy day, but where were all the White-fronted Chats?

Many thanks to all the many people who all enjoyed themselves no-end.

P.J. Curry

10 December 1983: Canning River & Estuary

Thirty persons holding binoculars arrived at Wilson Weir on 10 December 1983 at 8.00 a.m. Guided by Luke Pen, two small lakes were examined before the party walked upstream. After a refreshment stop, a smaller group went to Riverton bridge to look for crakes and rails — and Spotless Crakes were seen.

In all, 43 bird species were seen; a little disappointing, though a highlight was an Australian Hobby striking a Tree Martin (seen by one group) while another group saw the Hobby alight and devour its meal. A pleasant morning in a most interesting area, one more of Perth's astonishing bird watching locations in the midst of the city.

14 January 1984: Forrestdale Lake

The morning began cool and refreshing, enabling an enjoyable skulk through the reeds with the chance of discovering foraging crakes or waders, or even a close view of the many other waterbirds on Forrestdale Lake.

Although the crakes made themselves scarce initially and waders were in low numbers, by 2.00 p.m. all efforts had been rewarded. Sightings of special interest included Baillon's and Spotless Crakes, a Black-tailed Native-hen, 15 Wood Sandpipers, a Black-tailed Godwit, an immature Red-kneed Dotterel and a Long-toed Stint.

Most of the waders seen on Lake Forrestdale were roosting or feeding on exposed mud at the south end of the Lake. These included Curlew Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints, Red-capped Plovers and the one Long-toed Stint sighted. It was also at the south end that the crakes were seen foraging on the edge of the reeds. The reason for this may have been that more mud was exposed at the south end and there being less water in the reeds. The area of water was quite extensive for this time of year, providing excellent habitat for at least 35 waterbird species. Observers estimated that there were about 8,000 ducks on the lake!

It was an excursion full of surprises revealed to us by the assortment of telescopes brought by the 40 to 45 people attending.

28 January 1984: Herdsman Lake

A number of students from Dr. Stephen Davies' U.W.A. Extension Course on birds, swelled the numbers attending the excursion (many RAOU members were at Torbay). Some 44 bird species were noted, most of which were waterbirds. Great Crested Grebes were still feeding young: in fact all three grebe and all four cormorant species were recorded. Little Egrets and Yellow-billed Spoonbills were unusual sightings, the Red-kneed Dotterel and Wood Sandpiper being a little more usual.

Unfortunately, reports for the Torbay Campout and subsequent excursions have not yet been collated. These should appear in the **June issue**.

FROM STEPHEN DAVIES

Many of you will now know that I am going to divide my time equally between Perth and Melbourne this year as the RAOU's first **Director**. The RAOU has grown to a point where it really needs someone to coordinate its activities if it is to maintain the momentum of bird study in Australia, built up by the Atlas and continued by your participation in our many projects. There are now **18 RAOU staff** at six localities round Australia. I have been associated with a lot of this expansion and it is a privilege to be able to take a direct hand in seeing that it continues. But it can only go on if members support the Union's aims.

What does the RAOU aim to do? Simply to improve the preservation and knowledge of our native birds. It has always said that in its constitution and, lately, spelled out in the front of every *Emu*. Recently, with financial support from outside the RAOU, we have undertaken many studies that fulfil these aims. They have been possible because the membership has participated and enjoyed participating. They have been financially supported because the studies have been made to meet rigorous scientific standards and the results have been published both in our own reports and in other scientific journals.

In the tasks that I am undertaking now I shall be trying to maintain that balance, enjoyable participation by members and critical planning, analysis and writing by coordinators of the projects. That partnership is convincing because it works. For example it has produced an Atlas that will give Australian ornithology a **new dimension**; a wader survey that has revealed **Australia's true importance** to the world's waders. These are well known but there are many other really exciting advances in knowledge that will help us to look after our birds better. In W.A. our own Waterbird project is a **model** not just for Australia but for many of our near neighbours as well. Roger will be talking about it internationally at the IUCN meeting in Groningen in May this year.

These advances in knowledge take a long time to translate into concrete acts of **preservation**. But without them we cannot make useful progress. Increasingly our breadth of knowledge about birds is adding weight to our opinions and with gratifying frequency **our opinion is now being sought** by governments and planners. Not only is it sometimes hard for members to see the overall progress we are making but it is hard for the RAOU staff to see where their bit fits in too. So it is my task to try to **communicate** these successes, and some of the difficulties, all through the network of people like you who are the fibre of Australian ornithology. Next newsletter I'll take just one of our RAOU projects and tell you where it is going.

AT LAST THE ATLAS

The Atlas of Australian Birds will be published at the end of May 1984. **More than 300 birdwatchers collected 2,715,413 records** of birds between 1977 and 1981 to determine the distribution of Australia's birds. The Atlas is the result!

It has maps showing the distribution in 1° blocks of **645 species** and in 10' blocks of the 11 Tasmanian endemics. Another 102 uncommon and vagrant species are detailed in the text. Where the range of a species has changed greatly since European settlement, maps of its **historical distribution** are presented also. Each of the main species has a page devoted to it on which is the two-colour map, a black and white drawing of the bird and a **fully-referenced text**. The Field Atlas maps (1977-81) show grid blocks in which each species was reported and found breeding; different circle sizes show whether the bird was commonly or rarely reported in any grid block. The text discusses the range and movements of the species, where to find it and some factors governing its distribution.

During the Field Atlas a total of 885 1° blocks was visited of which 812 cover the continent of Australia and its main islands. The most widespread species was the Brown Falcon, reported in 769 1° blocks. The **most commonly reported** species differed from State to State. In Western Australia they were:

Willie Wagtail
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Australian Magpie

This and other information is included in the introduction of the Atlas.

In appreciation of the contribution made by birdwatchers and birdwatching organisations throughout Australia to the compilation of the Atlas, a pre-publication discount is available through the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union. **The recommended retail price will be \$49. The cost to people ordering through the RAOU before 9 March 1984 is \$39 plus postage.** Only orders accompanied by payment can be accepted. Send yours to: RAOU, 21 Gladstone St., Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3039. Order forms are available from the RAOU office in Canning Bridge.

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY 1984

- 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.** Petery 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

The highlight of the wader study scene in W.A. over the past few months was the **November North-West Expedition**, which resulted in the banding and dyeing of over **3,500 waders of 24 species**, which included a first for Australia in the form of a Red-necked Phalarope. A number of recaptures were made, most of birds banded previously in the North-West, but one Curlew Sandpiper had been banded by our Russian counterparts, this being only the **second Russian recovery** in Australia (The first was a Red-necked Stint at Alfred Cove in 1980). Another interesting

record set on the expedition was the sighting of a **blue-dyed Curlew Sandpiper** at Port Hedland; one of the birds banded and dyed in Malaya/Singapore by **Interwader-'83** last August.

On the local wader front, monthly counts of many sites in the south-west have been continuing, with a special effort being made in February for the national summer count. When the monthly counts finish in June, we should have a clearer idea of wader movements over the year including the seasonal movements of the migratory species as well as internal movements. One such local movement which we have recorded is the appearance of **large numbers of Curlew Sandpipers on the Swan Estuary** in January and February. We don't quite know where they come from, but many were developing breeding plumage in early February, so were probably thinking of heading north.

Local banding activities have not been as successful as our branding programme, partly because we loaned gear and personnel to the North-West Expedition, and missed out on a month of banding on the Estuary and nearby lakes, but also because of other commitments and the weather. **Strong sea-breezes** in the evenings have made netting at Pelican Point difficult, and lack of cooperation from the birds hasn't helped, but we are still getting birds banded, making valuable recaptures and coming to a clearer understanding on the complexities of ageing waders. The majority of recaptures made have been of birds **banded locally** in recent years, but one report just received was of a Curlew Sandpiper caught in Tasmania in November, 1983, which had been banded at Pelican Point in 1973.

Late in the season, arrangements were made to begin a **colour-banding** programme, specifically to look at movements between the Estuary and the lakes, such as Forrestdale, Yangebup, Thomsons and Coo loongup. This looks like it will not be fully underway until next season (yes, we are already thinking of next season), when a single colour band, either **white or mauve**, will be put on some wader species in addition to the usual metal band, but on the other leg. These colour bands should be quite visible from a distance, and will tell us where the birds were banded. Overseas banding groups have been informed, so some interesting information may result, as there is still very little data on wader movements into and out of Australia. The most recent international recovery of a bird banded by the WAWSG was of a Red-necked Stint banded near **Broome** on August 30, 1981, and caught at Dian Cheng, Guangdong, in the **People's Republic of China**, on December 22, 1983.

Although international recoveries may be few, our contact with overseas wader study groups is growing. Dr. Timothy Williams, of Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, was here briefly in February, when he discussed his work on **tracking migratory birds using radar** with RAOU members. In May, Dr. Gerard Boere, the Chairman of the Dutch Wader Study Group, will be in Perth, and there should be opportunities to hear of the work being carried out in the **Netherlands** on waders.

As promised, Doug has moved and his new address is 466 Canning Highway, Attadale 6156 (phone 330 1038); messages can also be left at the new RAOU Office. **Enquiries** regarding monthly counts and late-season banding activities should be directed towards Mike (H: 367 3032. W: 332 2468). On the subject of Mike, I thank everyone for their concern over my now non-existent appendix and please, no more jokes about my weight! I'm eating as much as I can!

Mike Bamford

BIRD REPORT: 1982, 1983 and 1984

Believe it or not, the 1982 report is now at the printers so it should be ready for distribution in the near future. **It will be sent to all members unless they inform me that they do not wish one.** Please pay on receipt of your copy as we do not have enough money to print it!

Work is now starting on the **1983 report** so could I please have your outstanding records **before the end of March**. When filling out the forms, the Atlas number is not essential but helpful, if you do not use the recognised names. Numbers do not need to be accurate but '1' or '2' or 'common' is better than a tick.

Remarks are voluntary but if your record is out of keeping with your previous experience of the area, please let me know as it

adds considerable value to the record. It is useful to know that the Blue-tongued Traddle-Lark you saw on New Year's Day is the first one there for 15 years, is very different from the same bird seen every day for the last 10 years, but your New Year's resolution to send in a record had only just started.

So please bear this in mind as you send in those 1983 records and think about the 1984 ones. There is a new edition of the *Travellers Atlas* of W.A., now available. It has some interesting new features and is a good buy.

Geoff Shannon
15 Lagonda Drive, Gwelup 6021

SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

Report by R.A.O.U. Field Officer, Roger Jaensch.

1. Exposé: Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

The Long-toed Stint breeds across Siberia from the Ural Mountains to the far-north Pacific and spends the northern winter at sites across southern Asia from India to New Guinea as well as in Australia. Counts since 1981 by the Australasian Wader Study Group of the R.A.O.U. have only produced a known population of "less than 100" Long-toed Stints in Australia.

In Western Australia, Long-toed Stints were first recorded in 1966 in the Murchison region but have subsequently been recorded in most parts of the State. My own observations in the Pilbara suggest that it may occur in moderate numbers in the North-West (i.e. small parties scattered generally), while all current evidence points to the South-West as being the most important area for Long-toed Stints in Australia.

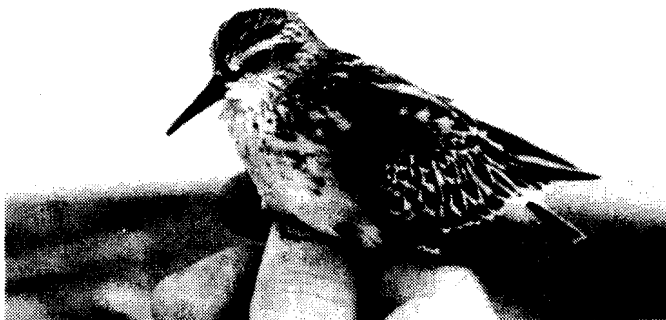
Although flocks of 20 to 30 often occur at three sites in southern S.A., Long-toed Stints rarely appear in such numbers in the far-eastern states. Concentrations in W.A. have reached 67 at Forrestdale Lake (22.2.81) and a similar number at Carnarvon on migration, while at least ten other southern sites regularly support from five to 25 birds.

Data from the Waterbird Project indicate that Long-toed Stints have used seven nature reserves since 1981, with a maximum of 26 birds at Forrestdale Lake in March, 1982. In addition, the 1984 A.W.S.G. Summer Count revealed 60 Long-toeds lurking in collapsed, boggy reedbeds at McLarty Lake near the Harvey Estuary. Other favoured non-reserve wetlands include Herdsman, Karakin and Yangebup Lakes (5 to 20 birds each).

The 1983 A.W.S.G. National Summer Count produced 40 Long-toed Stints, 65% of which were in the South-West. It would be reasonable to expect 150, or possibly more than 200 Long-toeds on the coastal plain in most summers.

Although Long-toed Stints sometimes occur in estuaries and at Saltfields, they seem to prefer fresh-water environments, particularly where stunted grass, reeds or other plant cover are available. They are typically shy, often deliberately seeking cover when landing, and 'erupting' from shelter at close range, surprising the observer who is unaware of their presence.

A detailed table highlighting points of identification for Long-toed Stints was given in *W.A. Bird Notes* No. 24. The most useful field characters are the Sharpie-like richly coloured upperparts and sweet, trilling calls.



A Long-toed Stint which was captured with mist-nets in Singapore. Note the heavily marked upperparts: Red-necked Stints only have rich upperparts if their throats are dark also (breeding plumage).

PHOTO BY DUNCAN PARISH

2. Glossy Ibises breeding at Chandala Lake

Patient detective work by George and Pam Agar, Grant Pearson and others has culminated in the discovery of two nests of the Glossy Ibis, *Plegadis falcinellus*, at Chandala Lake Nature Reserve. Most birds present at this magnificent paperbark swamp during spring and early summer apparently breed there. Therefore, regular use of the wetland by up to 11 Glossy Ibises has led observers to search carefully for active nests of this species.

The profusion of nesting Straw-necked Ibises and defecating young of various species has always been an obstacle to locating different nesting species at Chandala. However, in December 1983, nests with eggs and young of Glossy Ibises were located in the outer parts of a Chandala paperbark.

According to Waterbird Project data, Chandala is one of the top breeding sites for waterbirds in the South-West (16 species breeding) between July and January each year. As there appears to be only one other breeding locality recorded for Glossy Ibises in W.A. (in the Kimberley: Storr's List of Kimberley Birds), the Chandala site assumes even greater importance.

That a few pairs from a waterbird population of less than ten birds would nest in a mixed colony of a few thousand birds is quite interesting. However, both Sacred Ibises and Great Egrets have only five to ten nesting pairs at this site and Yellow-billed Spoonbills have presumably built up from a few pairs in the past to as many as 39 birds at present. Royal Spoonbills could well emulate this colonisation.

The most remarkable fact though, is that the known South-West population of Glossy Ibises is only 30 to 65 birds (S.W.W.P.). This species then shares the honour of 'rarest nesting waterbird species in the South-West' with the Little Egret and the three species of bittern.

3. Population Estimates

Some of the more interesting estimates of population size in the study area are given below. These are based on data processed to February 1984.

species	Number of wetlands recorded from	Wetlands at which Breeding has occurred	Population estimates minimum—maximum	
Little Bittern	7	3	8	20
Australasian Bittern	18	0	19	43
Pacific Black Duck	134	37	7095	25,581
Pink-eared Duck	72	39	6254	11,386
Hardhead	72	13	2887	7,731
Spotless Crane	20	4	33	118
Wood Sandpiper	4	—	32	64
Greenshank	44	—	267	712
Pectoral Sandpiper	5	—	2	6
Gull-billed Tern	9	1	51	38

Note: min. pop. estimate is derived from monthly totals for the study area; max. pop. estimate is the sum of the largest totals ever recorded at each wetland.

It is indeed encouraging to see wider recording of bitterns and crakes. Although their known populations are still gross underestimates, these figures are now quite useful. In reality I would expect Little Bitterns to overhaul the Australasian Bitterns in abundance. The relative abundances of the three ducks are largely expectable, but the total is probably most accurate for the Hardhead as most of its known favoured haunts are within our study.

4. Contributions

The 12 most prolific contributors of waterbird data sheets have been (in alphabetical order) Bruce Buchanan, Bob Burking, Pauline Clay, Austin Daw, David Doust, Mal Graham, David James, Steve Keeling, Brad Kneebone, Jim Lane, Brenda Newbey and Wayne Zadow. Space precludes printing the full list of contributors. While we are indebted to these persons, we look forward to receiving data from every participant. In this regard, we would be very pleased to receive sheets from those who have only sent in five or fewer sheets.

6. Pie Charts

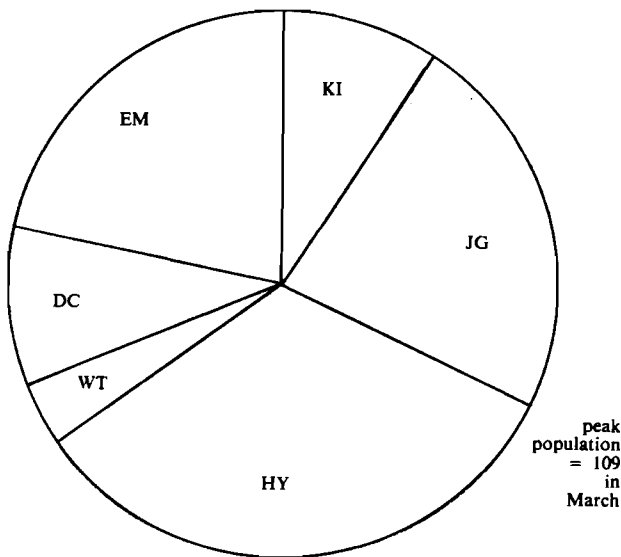
The two pie charts below, compare the importance of different regions of the South-West for two species of waders, during the months which have produced their peak South-West populations.

The peak population of the **Black-fronted Plover** is in March when the birds have greatest representation in the Harvey, Esperance-Munglinup and Jurien-Gingin Regions. These regions have numerous freshwater lakes, swamps and marshes which are the preferred habitat of Black-fronted Plovers. Of course many birds would have been overlooked at small lagoons, dams and ponds.

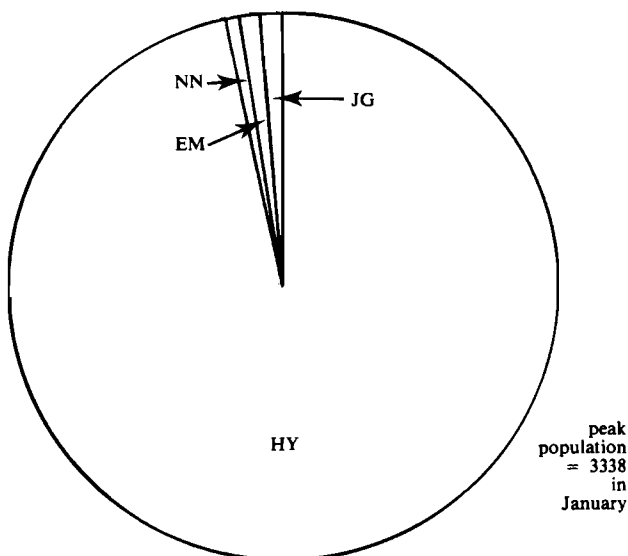
A different picture emerges for the **Curlew Sandpiper** which peaks in January: the great majority of these birds occur in the Harvey Region. Curlew Sandpipers occur in similar environments to Black-fronted Plovers, but large concentrations in Swan Coastal Plain estuaries and lakes reduce the significance to this species of wetlands in other regions.

The pie charts display information for the month in which the peak population estimate occurred, for two species. The sectors of each chart illustrate the *proportion of the peak population* that was present in various regions of the Project's study area, in the peak month. This gives us some idea of the relative importance of different regions to these waterbird species.

a. Black-fronted Plover



b. Curlew Sandpiper



KEY TO REGIONS

KI = Kalbarri
JG = Jurien-Gingin
HY = Harvey
WT = Wongan-Tammin

NN = Narrogin
DC = Denmark-Cranbrook
EM = Esperance-Munglinup

7. Information

- New Waterbird Office** — Suite 30, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road (South), Canning Bridge, W.A. 6153. Phone (09) 364 6202.
- Preferred Survey Periods** — March 10-18, May 12-20, July 14-22, September 8-16.
- Assistance in March, April and May**

The Clerical Assistant for the Waterbird Project, **Shapelle McNee**, will be able to deal with many requests for help while I am overseas from March to May. She will be able to post out computer forms and booklets, refer to entries in the data bank and on printouts and suggest other authorities to contact with reserve management matters. I have instructed her in the workings of the Project so that she may be able to assist with most queries.

Please do not hesitate to write or ring the Waterbird Office. Address Waterbird Project mail to:

'The Field Officer' or
'The Field Officer,
Waterbird Project'.

- Final Year of Survey:**

Beginning with the survey in July and ending in the May 1985 census, we will have the final year of fieldwork for the Project. It would be beneficial for all participants to assess the thoroughness and effectiveness of their survey efforts prior to June, 1984. Obviously, we would stand to gain considerably from making the final year as comprehensive and accurate as possible.

Questions to ask yourself could include:

- Am I covering as much of the wetland as I can, while still counting birds at a fair level of accuracy? Or more importantly . . .
- Are the route and basic methods that I'm using consistent for each survey (including special techniques where needed — e.g. at times of bird concentration)?
- Am I possibly missing some waterbird species (read up on habitats and behaviour of waterbirds in texts)?

I hope to be in contact with all participants in June or July to make further comments and suggestions. However, any observer should feel free to write with queries. I can't promise to reply immediately due to the backlog of mail to be dealt with after my overseas study trip. Nevertheless, I will reply as soon as I possibly can.

R.J.

INTERESTING WATERBIRD SIGHTINGS

No. 10 Summer 1983-84

Note:* indicates wetland is **not** within a WAWA Wetland Nature Reserve being studied in the Waterbird Project. Unless otherwise indicated, the place names refer to lakes or swamps. To assist the reader, shire names are given in brackets following the wetland names.

(a) Interesting localities (new or unusual)

NL = New locality for SWWP.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Great Crested Grebe | — 10, 30/10, Martinup (Woodanilling): NL. |
| | — 2, 11/1, Utcha (Northampton): NL. |
| Great Egret | — 13, 8/1, Deadman's (W. Arthur). |
| Australasian Bittern | — 2, Sept. 1983, Condingup area* (Esperance). |
| | — 1, 17/11, McLarty* (Murray): NL. |
| | — 1, 22/11, Tordit-Garrup (Manjimup): NL. |
| | — 4, 9/12, Kulunilup (Cranbrook): NL. |