



# Western Australian Bird Notes

NUMBER 33  
MARCH 1984

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

Registered by  
Australia Post  
Publication No. WBH1453

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## MEMBERSHIP TOPS 500

Steady growth in membership of the RAOU in Western Australia has been apparent for several years and the 500 mark was passed early in 1985. On 23rd January, our records indicated that **525 RAOU members were based in W.A.** This has caused some chaos at the Melbourne Office as the computer listings for W.A. members now need to be handled on two files!

Recent acceleration in the rate of membership increase can be attributed to the efforts of the Metropolitan Bird Project (especially Ron Van Delft), the Rottneest Bird Walks (especially Steve Keeling, Nick Klomp and other leaders), and the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre (Mandy Silberstein).

The WA Group of the RAOU is certainly a force to be reckoned with, being a large community interest group by any standards and having a tremendous volunteer force for collection of bird data. Our publications, activities and projects are the envy of many other groups and the Victorian Branch of the RAOU has emulated some of our methods and strategies.

The Committee of the W.A. Group has a heavy responsibility in organising such a large 'operation' and its present and past officers have contributed mightily. However, we **need more assistance** from members, especially in the areas of office volunteers, typistes, leaders for excursions and helpers at meetings. These are not complicated needs, but are nevertheless important.

Members are encouraged to offer their help and suggestions on the running of our activities to a member of the Committee. (See list on back page).



Bird-walks for the Metro Bird Project have been tremendously popular.  
Photograph by Eric Van Delft.

## THE ATTRACTION OF ARGYLE

Many travellers have visited the Lake Argyle Tourist Village but few would have been aware of the importance of this massive wetland for waterbirds. The Ord Dam and Tourist Village are situated in the rugged north-western sector of the lake which, being mostly steep-sided, has few feeding opportunities for waterbirds.

The eastern and southern shores of Lake Argyle are mostly shallow and are interrupted by interesting inlets which are actually drowned valleys of creeks. This type of environment attracts large numbers of waterbirds to feed on the abundant food items which thrive in the warm shallows.

Access to the eastern shores is restricted, with only one convenient approach for conventional vehicles, along the old route of the Duncan Highway. Even this can be difficult in places, especially in the wet season. Local ornithologist Ken Mills has made several visits to the area and has alerted us to its potential for use by waterbirds.

On 4th January, 1985, I was privileged to be able to make a four hour survey of 5.5km of shoreline of the lake in the vicinity of Matilda Creek. **Forty-four species** of waterbirds were recorded, including 16 species of waders. This result compares more than favourably with other wetlands of the Kimberley, such as the Parry Creek floodplain area.

The wet season had not fully begun, so birds were still in fair numbers. Most numerous were more than 3,000 Oriental Pratincoles, flushed continuously from short new growth above the water line. Totals for the Little Curlew and Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks each exceeded 500 and declining species such as the Green Pygmy-Goose and Radjah Shelduck were also well represented. Six Comb-crested Jacanas made a strange sight trotting about on water weed, rather more exposed than in their usual lily-pad haunts.

The great annual rise and fall in water level of Lake Argyle restricts the establishment of permanent aquatic vegetation such as bulrush *Typha* or freshwater mangrove *Barringtonia*. However, the bare shores in the late dry season are ideal for migratory waders such as Marsh Sandpipers which were spread along the entire survey route on 4th January. Jabirus were seen catching Long Tom fish in the sheltered inlets and they were accompanied by Intermediate Egrets, Glossy Ibises, Royal Spoonbills and Black-tailed Godwits. Less common species included the White-winged Tern and a *Gallinago* snipe.

Clearly this picture could have been repeated many times along the 100km of shallows around Lake Argyle. The potential importance of this site as a wetland of international significance might well be investigated by the RAOU in coming years. R.J.

## COMING MEETINGS

Meetings of the WA Group of the RAOU are currently held in the **Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre**, unless a different venue is announced in this newsletter. The room opens at 7.30pm and meetings aim to start at 8.00pm. Visitors are especially welcome.

Car-parking space is available at the entrance to the Centre's driveway, near the intersection of Flynn Road and Selby Street, Wembley.

### Monday 25th March: Dr Weishu Hsu:

The RAOU is privileged to have a visiting Chinese ornithologist, Dr. Hsu, speak to us about **bird study in the People's Republic of China**. Dr. Hsu is Associate Professor at the Peking Natural History Museum (Head of Vertebrates Section) and Deputy Secretary-General of the Ornithological Society of China.

This is not the first visit of Dr. Hsu to Australia but it will be his longest, staying two months in Western Australia. His talk will include a small selection of slides and will be given in English, with a little Mandarin flavour here and there!

Do come along and meet Dr. Hsu. He is a very approachable man, eager to meet other bird-watchers and learn about their activities and aspirations.

### Monday 27th May: Film Night:

On this occasion we will be screening *"Wings over the Danube"*, a colour film about birds of Hungary and Bulgaria with long sequences of Spoonbills and Great Egrets at the nest. This film was made in the early 1960's and some of it was seen on British TV.

The venue for this film will be the **F.J. Clarke Lecture Theatre**, in the **Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre** starting at 7.30pm. The cost will be \$3.00 for members and \$5 for visitors. Refreshments will be provided.

This will take the place of the advertised May 6th meeting and proceeds will be put towards capital equipment for the Eyre Bird Observatory. **Tickets are available from Committee members.**

## COMING EXCURSIONS

Excursions and campouts are directed toward both country and metropolitan localities and aim to provide experience in bird recognition and appreciation to both members and newcomers. Information gathered on the day is often used for specific management or educational purposes.

Interested newcomers are always welcome at any event and experienced birdwatchers are only too pleased to assist with identification of unfamiliar birds.

**Codes MBP** = part of the programme of the Metropolitan Bird Project, organised by Project Officer, Ron Van Delft.  
**MBP/RAOU** = Joint excursion of MBP and RAOU.  
**SWS** = Special Waterbird Survey, organised by Field Officer Roger Jaensch.  
**RAOU** = 'standard' RAOU excursions.

### Sunday, March 24: Alfred Cove (MBP)

Your last chance to see the migratory waders before they return to Asia — and receive some clues on how to identify them. Some waders may be sporting their breeding colours! Alfred Cove is also a good place to see Buff-banded Rails. Meet at 9.00am at the carpark near the tall antenna.

### Saturday, March 30: Dumbleyung Lake Survey (SWS)

Dumbleyung Lake is the largest inland lake, by volume, in the southern part of Western Australia. Although it has sometimes been dry, when full it exceeds 4.0 metres in depth. As such, Dumbleyung Lake is an important wetland for water-



Jabirus seek out Long Toms and other fish in the inlets on the eastern side of Lake Argyle.

Photograph by Roger Jaensch.

birds, particularly in drier months. Being of such a large area, it has rarely been thoroughly investigated for the South-West Waterbird Project.

Any person wishing to participate in a boat survey of Dumbleyung Lake on March 30th, should contact **Roger Jaensch** at the RAOU office before Friday, March 22. Some experience in counting waterbirds would be useful but not essential (we always need scribes!) Extra boats or canoes will be useful.

### Saturday, April 13: Whiteman Park/Caversham (MBP/RAOU)

From our gathering place at Stirling Square in Stirling Street, Guildford (0830), we expect to visit the 'conservation area' identified in the Whiteman Park Concept Plan. We might visit the Edgumbe Bird Sanctuary afterwards.

### Saturday, April 20: Seabirds — Continental Shelf.

This excursion is run through the WA Seabird Group of the RAOU but all are welcome. **You must book by March 20 at the RAOU office in W.A.** A booking fee of \$20 is required and the total cost is expected to be about \$30. Of special interest will be those species which are present as a result of the plankton blooms which should occur at this time of year. Enquiries to Steve Keeling on 291 7592.

### Sunday, April 28: Kelmscott Bushland/Mary Carroll Park (MBP/RAOU)

This will replace the advertised visit to Coolesongup Lake. We aim to visit bushland near Peter Curry's house where more than 60 species of birds have been recorded and later carry on to Mary Carroll Park to look at waterbirds. Park in Orlando Street, Kelmscott, beside the Kelmscott Primary School at 9.00am. We will gather again at 11.00am at Mary Carroll Park, in Eudoria Street, Gosnells.

### Saturday, May 5: John Forrest National Park (RAOU).

Meet at 9.00am at Glen Brook Dam, via No. 2 Entrance — look out for the kangaroos! Do Southern Emu-wrens still occur in the Park? What about Crested Shrike-tits?

### Monday, May 13: Peel Inlet Survey (SWS)

Many people know that Peel Inlet is the most important wetland in the south of the State, but few have first-hand experience of the bird-life of its eastern shore reserves. A resolute team of observers from the local branch of the Naturalists Club has made monthly counts of waterbirds in this area since May 1982.

If you would like to assist the team in their last survey and encounter the waterbirds of this interesting 'wild' area, please contact Roger Jaensch. Surveys in May often produce large totals of Great Egrets and White-faced Herons.

#### **Sunday, May 19: Ferndale wetlands (MBP)**

This area must be good for birds, as four metro birding sites lie between Riverton and Nicholson Road bridges! Meet at the Kent Street weir on Canning River, Wilson, 2.00pm.

#### **Saturday, May 25: Chittering Valley (RAOU)**

Meet at 0830 at the roadhouse at Chittering, mid-way between Muchea and Bindoon on the Great Northern Highway. We may also visit the Moondyne Reserve. Organiser — Brian Barrett, 295 2136.

#### **Saturday, June 8: Lake Claremont/Swanbourne Beach (RAOU/MBP)**

We will be specifically looking for White-winged Fairy-wrens in the sand dunes at Swanbourne, starting at the Swanbourne Beach carpark (north end of Marine Parade) at 0800. Gather at the south end of Strickland Street, Swanbourne at 1030 for a look at Lake Claremont.

## **MEETING REPORTS**

The 1984 Annual Social Night was held in the grounds of the W.A.I.T. at Bentley on 1st December. Weather conditions were once again excellent and the chicken and curry meal was devoured by observers returning from the Bird Tally. The dinner provided a relaxed setting for meeting and chatting with newcomers and friends.

The Annual General Meeting at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre on 14th January, was attended by about 70 persons. A new committee was elected (see back page), reports were read and members enjoyed the opportunity to talk about the coming year with other bird-watchers.

## **EXCURSION REPORTS**

#### **17-18 November: Karakin — 'Sapphire' — Gingin**

Beginning our morning at the sandpits on K.W. Road south of Lancelin, we recorded 23 species and had superb views of White-backed Swallows. At Karakin Lake we recorded 30 species including hundreds of Straw-necked Ibises, Black-winged Stilts, a few waders, four Emus and a Stubble Quail.

Before setting up camp at Sapphire Bird Sanctuary we made a full circuit of this lake and counted 40 species. Here we watched young Yellow-billed Spoonbills being fed in three separate but neighbouring nests in paperbarks in the lake. In the cormorant colony, three young Little Black Cormorants were being fed and we also had numerous glimpses of immature and adult Night Herons.

On Sunday, led by Bruce Buchanan, we explored Big Bootine L. and the Beermullah lake area which were new to us but familiar to Bruce from regular surveys. The lake north of Drew Road gave us good sightings of spoonbills, waders, grebes and a Glossy Ibis.

**D. Beckingham**

#### **January 25-28: Torbay Campout**

This three day campout was attended by 35 adults and several day visitors. We all enjoyed the sweeping ocean views of the Woodbury Boston complex and listed forty species of birds, including Southern Emu-wrens, Elegant Parrots and Red-eared Firetails within 500 metres of the camp. On nearby swampland at Cosy Corner a Spotted Harrier was seen several times, at the mouth of the creek on Perkins Beach we saw two Hooded Plovers, and a seawatch at Shelley's Beach gave good views of Flesh-footed Shearwaters.

Further afield at Lake Grasmere an Australasian Bittern, a Cattle Egret, a Buff-banded Rail and Greenshanks were recorded, while at Torbay Inlet 200 Red-necked Avocets, 750 Red-necked Stints and 4 Spotless Crakes were noted.

At Two People's Bay, thanks to a dawn arrival and Lesley Harrison's guiding, many of us had the thrill of hearing then seeing two Western Bristlebirds feeding on a path. Others saw the elusive Western Whipbird and some even caught fleeting glimpses of the Noisy Scrub-bird which was calling loudly near the Picnic Area. Steven Gast returned at dawn the next day to have an even better look at a Noisy Scrub-bird behind the Ranger's Office.

The Anecdote competition was won by Simon Nevill with two lively stories about climbing to a Peregrine's nest and luring an inquisitive emu. Doug and company carolled their way through 'The Twelve Birds of Torbay', transposing 'a partridge in a pear tree' to a more appropriate 'osprey in a gum tree'.

We listened for Ground Parrots on two evenings without success, but managed to see a Tawny Frogmouth and a young Boobook Owl during these patrols.

**D. Beckingham**

NOTE: No reports have been received for the excursion to Woodman Point (24/11/84) or Maylands area (16/12/84).

#### **January 26: Gingin Wetlands**

Eighteen people gathered south of Gingin on 26 January 1985 before moving on to Big Bootine Swamp. This wetland was nearly dry and only 50 Red-capped Plovers remained of the 500 present two weeks previously. Similar large numbers appeared when the swamp dried in 1984.

The next site visited was Beermullah Lake, where bird numbers had diminished because of water skiing, and the adjacent Drew Lake which had large concentrations of Little Black Cormorants. Lunch was eaten on the shores of Bambun Lake to an accompaniment of Clamorous Reed-Warblers. A short walk along the southern shore revealed a lone Avocet swimming 50 metres from the shore. This was the 44th species seen at the Lake.

**Bruce Buchanan**

#### **Metropolitan Bird Project bird-walks**

A bird-walk held at the Bayswater Bird Sanctuary on 18 November attracted 80 persons, while another at Forrestdale Lake on 13 January was attended by 35. A number of new members were secured as a result of these gatherings.

#### **January 20: Lake Gwelup walk**

Thirty four species were seen by over 80 observers at Lake Gwelup on Sunday. It was an excellent day for bird watching although the winds were up a little.

The large group was split into three smaller groups lead by Ruth Clark, Geoff Shannon and Kevin Jordan.

Some of the birds seen included the Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Grey Butcherbird and Sacred Kingfisher. The Australasian Grebes were breeding and chicks were seen bobbing up and down amongst the waves.

**Ruth Clark**

## **EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY**

The overall recording area for Eyre Bird Observatory is six ten minute grid-squares, approximately 47km from east to west and 37km from north to south, but one-fifth of this area is ocean. A high proportion of our time is spent in the 'home' square and 176 species have been recorded in this square. The Observatory total stands at 220 at the end of 1984, but includes an old pre-observatory record of Crested Shrike-tit which looks rather doubtful in view of the species' habitat preference, sedentary habits and RAOU Atlas status.

Monthly totals of species well illustrate the peak season for variety: June-72; July-91, August-105, September-113, October-129, November-111 and December-103. I shall be int-

rigued to see how we fare through the remainder of my first year here.

The **Shore Birds** Course at the end of October into November only attracted three participants, a very disappointing response especially for Angela Jessop from RAOU HQ who had travelled over to co-lead the course. However, as we had only one functional vehicle it worked out well, and everyone had really excellent views of 19 species of waders, as well as seeing a wide variety of other species. I discovered from Angela that our spring assemblage of 75 or so Sooty Oystercatchers represents at least 6% of the known Australian total. Thus, nationally, this must be by far the **rarest species** of bird that is regularly present at Eyre.

A Wood Sandpiper at Cocklebidy on 17 November and 22 Greenshanks and 10 Common Sandpipers near Nine Mile reef in late November were the most noteworthy wader records until the New Year. Then stifling temperatures of up to 47°C on 11 January on the Nullarbor may have induced some plains waders to seek cooler areas: I saw my first Oriental Plover on January 12 on the return journey from Cocklebidy.

Along the beach and dune-flats next day we found no less than **22 Oriental Plovers**, **44 Banded Lapwings** and one Inland Dotterel — all had gone the day after.

Parrots warrant a mention this time. The higher-than-average rainfall and lush conditions on the Hampton Tableland induced good numbers of **Budgerigars** to move into the area and breed, and flocks of several hundred have been a regular feature of trips to Cocklebidy: up to 1,000 have been drinking at the sewage pool behind the motel! A pair of Naretha Blue-Bonnets has been seen on several occasions in one area south of the Eyre Highway and may well have nested in our recording area for the first time (we haven't had time to prove it!). The highlight of the beach count on 23 December was, remarkably, a flock of **12 Cockatiels feeding on the seaweed** at Nine Mile (just one old record for our area, one at Cocklebidy). Next week, on 30 December, the prize went to two Rock Parrots, also at Nine Mile, with a further three on 18 January (three previous records).

Our local **Pink Cockatoos** have provided visitors with endless enjoyment. Around the observatory building they come to drink, to bicker with the Australian Ravens, swing on the radio aerial and of course to wake everyone up. On the beach some have been watched inexplicably wading into the gently running surf. They are also dab hands at picking the seeds of *Spinifex hirsutus* and I am thinking of training them to sow the seeds in rows all over the mobile sand dunes. The peak count of cockatoos to date is 93 plus the one remaining hybrid Galah/Pink Cockatoo, but I think we might get a century soon.

Brush Bronzewing has been good value too, with as many as five simultaneously at the drinking tray on the roof of the underground tank (when the ravens and cockies were away). At least 10 individuals come in to drink on some days.

During a too-long period with no visitors in November we had a **nocturnal mist-netting** session in the mallee above the escarpment, resulting in five Owllet-nightjars banded. Campouts at Nine Mile and in the dunes 8km east of Eyre enabled us to band most useful selections of honeyeaters. The combined November/December totals were 372 banded and 80 retraps and lots of completed moult-cards.

The post-Christmas period has been very hectic, with a welcome stream of visitors, two **departing Assistant Wardens** (thank you Peter and Jill for all your help) and one newly-arrived Assistant (welcome Anthony). We've also had plenty of problems with the one and only vehicle. Fitted into this period have been 14 trips to Cocklebidy, seven additional trips to the Microwave Tower and one mechanical-repair trip to Arubiddy Station, 30km north of Cocklebidy. Many thanks to Peter Brown for his help, advice and expertise with oxy-acetylene and sledge-hammer.

Lastly I would like to say a big **Thank You** to all our friends over west, in the land of traffic-jams, supermarkets and round-the-corner services, for the consignment of kitchen-ware, hardware, furnishings, tools and odds and ends, and also for the seasonal goodies that were intended for, and ended up in, our stomachs.

Nick Dymond

## ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

R.A.O.U. (W.A. GROUP) 1984

I have much pleasure in presenting the Annual Report of the W.A. Group for 1984. It has been a year of much activity, growth and change. Dr Stephen Davies resigned as Chairman of the Group upon his appointment as Director of R.A.O.U. and Miss Barbara Hale was elected in his place at the August General Meeting. **Tribute has already been paid to Dr Davies for his Chairmanship** over many years and to his enthusiasm and foresight, which has led to the expansion of bird-watching in this State and, consequently, to the increase in membership. In addition, your committee wishes to place on record in this report their appreciation of his work for, and his untiring dedication to, the aims of R.A.O.U. in W.A.

In February, the Group moved into **office space at Canning Bridge**, from which the Field Officers can operate and which acts as a focal point for members and activities of the Group. Here a start has been made on building up a small library of publications and slides for the use of members. The cost of maintaining this office is borne largely by the various projects run in Western Australia, but the W.A. Group members contribute over \$800 a year and staff if on a voluntary basis five mornings a week. As we now have over four hundred members, this is approximately \$2.00 per member.

You may be interested to know that Western Australia, the State with a tenth of Australia's population, makes up about a quarter of R.A.O.U.'s membership and provides about a fifth of its subscription revenue. No one can deny the advantages of having such an office, but as no portion of our national membership fee is returned for the Group's use, its existence has increased the need for fund-raising in order to maintain it. This has mainly taken the form of buying in bulk several publications and reselling them at a small profit. Fortunately, there has been no dearth in the publication of bird books and the demand for them.

Your Committee has made the decision to charge a nominal fee for *W.A. Bird Notes* from the beginning of 1985, and is exploring other avenues to cover its costs which are at present borne by the Projects which terminate within twelve months' time. I am sure you will agree that this publication is an excellent newsletter, and our thanks and congratulations on its quality are due to Roger Jaensch, its editor.

The main event of the year was the launching of the *Atlas of Australian Birds* by the Governor, Professor Gordon Reid. Not only was it a memorable occasion, but a very enjoyable social one. Five General Meetings were held during the year in the Mathematics Building at the University of Western Australia, and were well attended. The venue was not altogether satisfactory as, although equipment for the projection of slides and video recordings was excellent, the absence of an adjacent supper room discouraged social contact after the formal part of the meeting. In 1985 we will try using the **Wildlife Centre** at Lake Herdsman.

The 24-hour **bird tally** held prior to the end-of-year party was again popular with 14 teams rushing enthusiastically round the metropolitan area. Many more **excursions** were held during the year, and these have been reported fully in *Bird Notes*. All were well attended, including the eight weekend ones. Of the latter, the one to Dryandra was a successful joint activity with the WA Naturalists Club.

In the middle of the year a **questionnaire** was distributed to members in an endeavour to find out which aspects of bird-watching were of particular interest to members, and to seek assistance and suggestions in order to utilize the wide variety of expertise present in the membership. There was a good response and the Committee was delighted by the positive suggestions and offers of assistance received, and it will be acting on many of them.

Our participation in the nation-wide **Bird Week** and the mounting of a display at the Royal Show have publicised bird-watching

and R.A.O.U. to the Community, as have a series of **bird walks** conducted on Rottnest Island with the assistance of the Island's Education Officer in the August school holidays. The latter proved so popular that similar ones have been run during the summer holiday season. We are also becoming well-known to government bodies and local authorities, in that we have been invited to **comment on environmental matters** and have made a further submission to the Committee assisting the Land Release Review. We have also made representations regarding such matters as the use of insecticides in wetlands and the disturbance of tern nesting areas.

I would like to comment on the **support given to the major R.A.O.U. projects by our members** who have participated so enthusiastically. There are also other individual projects such as the WA Bird Report, which are continuing. The interest they provide has helped to maintain the general feeling of purpose and cooperative fellowship first engendered by the Bird Atlas.

It has also been a year of change for the **Eyre Bird Observatory**. Peter and Di Congreve retired as Wardens in May, thus bringing to an end a memorable era of bird-watching and warm hospitality at Eyre, which will long be remembered by those of you who have stayed there. We were fortunate in obtaining the services of Nick Dymond with his experience in British Observatories, who took up the position of Warden in June. Two Assistant Wardens from New South Wales were appointed, but both resigned at the end of the year to pursue studies. Eyre is now a recognised weather station sending information to the Bureau of Meteorology twice a day, which makes it necessary to have at least two members of staff there all the year.

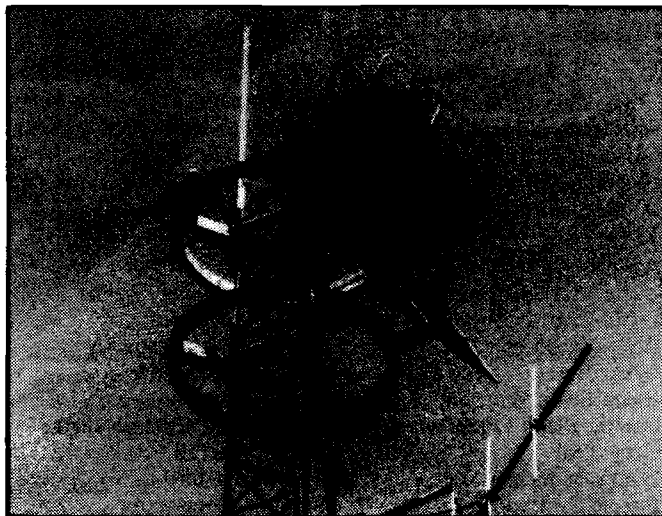
Facilities have been improved at Eyre by the installation of a telephone and a solar energy plant. The latter will cut down the fuel consumption if we can replace the gas appliances with electrical ones. Donations are being sought from companies for these, as well as for a four-wheel drive vehicle which is badly needed. Members have responded generously to requests for household goods.

It remains for me to **thank many people** for their support and interest throughout the past year. First I wish to pay tribute to the hard-working members of the Committee and Sub-Committees, especially the Vice-Chairman Rosalind Denny who, in the absence of Stephen Davies in Melbourne, acted as Chairman for many months, the Secretary Joan Seabrook and the Treasurer Dan Drakes, neither of whom is seeking re-election to these positions. Joan's involvement with R.A.O.U. goes back many years, during which she has contributed much to the WA Group, and I am glad that she has now become a member of the 1985 Committee. Dan Drakes has been a meticulous treasurer and we shall be sorry to lose his help. Thanks are also due to our office volunteers who either regularly, or at short notice, have given their time in staffing the office, undertaking a variety of clerical tasks.

It would be invidious to mention names as I am sure it is true to say that every member has, in some way, contributed to the Group. But I wish to record my thanks to the Field Officers and other experienced ornithologists who have patiently given of their knowledge, the Excursion leaders — especially the organisers of the Campouts who have ensured the success of these popular activities, the donors of household items and tools for Eyre and of books for meeting raffles, the providers of interest-free loans to allow us to make bulk purchases of books for resale, those individuals who have done their own fund-raising for the Group by making and selling jams and cakes, those who have organised the catering for the social functions or have mounted displays for Bird Week at the Royal Show, those members who generously offered the use of their properties for campouts, and those who — at short notice — went to Eyre as volunteer Assistant Wardens to help out.

In short, **thank you all** for your enthusiasm and support which makes this such a great Group to belong to.

BARBARA M. HALE



This Osprey nest at the top of a television tower in Onslow, has been used on several occasions. The nest interferes with TV reception, but this is tolerated by the residents of Onslow.

Photograph by Geoff Shannon.

## METRO BIRD PROJECT

**Publicity** in local newspapers in early January gave a tremendous boost to the Metro Bird Project. Over 70 enquiries were received resulting in over 51 new sites gaining observers. **Special thanks** must go to the the RAOU members who are providing results for over 90 sites.

Unfortunately, the distribution of birdwatchers around the Metropolitan area is still uneven. **People are required** in the following localities and reserves;

- any locality in the following suburbs: Cannington, Queens Park, Hamersley, Balcatta, Greenwood and Glen Forrest;
- reserves needing people include: Carine Swamp, Trigg open space, Gnangarra Lake, Jandabup Lake, Hyde Park, Lesmurdie Falls, Buckland Hill and the salt flats at Garrett Road Bridge.

Extra observers would be welcomed for Whiteman Park and Mawson Park.

The **first analysis** of results is expected to be completed during April. Office volunteers are currently typing in the data!

Observers who feel that their reserve has a lot to offer are invited to contact me to arrange a **public bird walk**. A public bird walk raises awareness of the importance of your site. The relevant local authority is always informed about the walk beforehand.

I wish to correct some confusion regarding the excellent **bird slides** shown by Channel 9 as background for the weather. I sent the slides in but acknowledgement was not given to the people who donated them to the RAOU slide library. Efforts have been made to obtain due acknowledgement in the future.

Although the **RAOU slide library** now has over 150 slides it lacks slides of several birds which are very common around Perth. Birds which lack representation in the library include;

Hoary-headed Grebe	Grey Fantail
Australian Kestrel	Clamorous Reed-Warbler
Silver Gull	Western Gerygone
Laughing Turtle-Dove	Brown Honeyeater
Port Lincoln Ringneck	Striated Pardalote
Welcome Swallow	Australian Magpie-lark
Tree Martin	Australian Magpie
Rufous Whistler	Australian Raven

Slides of these birds will be gratefully accepted and acknowledged in our catalogue.

**RECOMMENDED SURVEY DATES FOR M.B.P.**

\* March 6-12 \* April 3-9 \* May 1-7 \* May 29-June 4

## BIRD TALLY — 1984

The data for the 1984 24hr Metropolitan Bird Tally has been fully analysed and provides information on what birds are commonly seen in one day in December. Table One shows the 27 species of birds which were seen by all of the 15 teams that participated in the hunt.

**Table One:**

Australian Pelican	Crested Tern
Little Black Cormorant	Laughing Turtle-Dove
Little Pied Cormorant	Port Lincoln Ringneck
White-faced Heron	Laughing Kookaburra
Great Egret	Welcome Swallow
Black Swan	Tree Martin
Pacific Black Duck	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Grey Teal	Willie Wagtail
Dusky Moorhen	Red Wattlebird
Purple Swamphen	Singing Honeyeater
Eurasian Coot	Brown Honeyeater
Black-winged Stilt	Australian Magpie
Silver Gull	Australian Raven
Caspian Tern	

The average number of species of birds seen by each team increased by 13 for 1984 compared with 1983. In 1983 there was an average of 71.8 species per team and in 1984 there was an average of 84.6 per team.

The types of habitats visited by the teams play a large part in determining the types of birds seen. Tables Two and Three outline the number of teams that visited the various habitats.

**Table Two:**

Habitat Range	No. of Teams
Lake, Bush, River, Ocean sites	8
Lake, Bush, River sites only	2
Lake, River, Ocean sites only	4
River, and Lake sites only	1

**Table Three**

% Of Teams Visiting The Habitat		
Habitat	1983	1984
Lake	80	100
Bush	60	66
River	55	100
Ocean	38	80

A total of 40 sites were visited by the teams and the ten sites most visited in the 1984 Bird Tally are listed below in descending order.

**Table Four:**

Site Name	No. of Teams	Site Name	No. of Teams
1. Alfred Cove	12	6. Pelican Pt	6
2. Bibra Lake	12	7. Lake Monger	5
3. Woodman Point	11	8. Kings Park	4
4. Herdsman Lake	9	9. South Mole, N. Mole	4
5. Thomsons Lake	7	10. Lake Claremont	3

The 40 sites visited by the teams can be categorised into different habitats.

**Table Five:**

Habitat Type	No. of Sites	Habitat Type	No. of Sites
Lake	18	River	7
Bush	11	Ocean	4

In the 1983 Metropolitan Bird Tally, Bridled Terns were sighted by 6 of the 21 teams. The 1984 Bird Tally failed to show any sign of the tern, possibly because favoured haunts near Rockingham were excluded from the latest tally.

The 1984 bird tally covered a radius of 30km from the Perth G.P.O. and gave a good indication of the birds of the Perth Metropolitan Area.

Ruth Clark  
WAIT Work Experience Student

## FIELD IDENTIFICATION

### SNIPE

The snipe of the genus *Gallinago* pose special difficulties in identification. Many texts suggest that certain species cannot be safely separated in the field. Even in the hand, plumage characters are remarkably similar and potentially useful features have been cast aside, perhaps temporarily, in the face of perplexing variations from one individual to the next.

Three species are known to occur in Australia, namely Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*, Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* and the Pin-tailed Snipe *G. stenura*. The Common Snipe *G. gallinago* could well be recorded in the near future, as more observers look critically at snipe in the field and in the hand. It reaches the Philippines and Greater Sundas. Wood Snipe *G. nemoricola* migrate as far as Malaysia and should also be considered, likewise the rather more distinctive Jack Snipe *Lymnocyrtes minimus* which reaches the Andamans and Philippines.

For some years we have understood that Latham's Snipe visit the east coast of Australia and at least as far west as the Adelaide region while Swinhoe's Snipe occur regularly in the Top End and Kimberley. In recent years Pin-tailed Snipe have been netted and collected in the Pilbara.

As reported in this and previous issues (Nos. 29 and 30) of *W.A. Bird Notes*, snipe of the genus *Gallinago* have been observed on six occasions in the south of Western Australia since January 1984. No doubt this has been partly due to more man-hours spent in wetlands than in earlier decades. A snipe caught near Osborne Park in March 1984 was identified as a Pintailed Snipe, a logical extension from the Pilbara population of this species.

Unfortunately, we now realise that the distribution of snipe in Australia is more complex, denying observers the convenience (mistaken, in any case), of identifying their snipe from known distributions. Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* (1976 edition) list records and captures of Latham's Snipe and Swinhoe's Snipe from the Pilbara, though Storr and Johnstone in *Field Guide to the Birds of Western Australia* (1979) exclude Latham's on the grounds of mistaken identity. Further observations in the Pilbara suggest that all three species might be encountered in that region, but this must be verified by mist-netting. Probable sight records of Latham's Snipe in the Eucla division in the 1984-85 season and mist-netted specimens of Pin-tailed Snipe from near Darwin further complicate the issue.

Field guides to the Birds of South-East Asia, Japan and Hong Kong give valuable details on snipe, but only the Japanese guide gives equal comparisons between the three species which visit Australia. Furthermore, some pieces of information appear to contradict each other.

Nevertheless, using these and other references, museum skins and my own experience through confirmed sightings of four species, I have collated guidelines which should be useful.

#### Diagnostic field characters.

**Common** — white trailing upper edge to secondaries, usually conspicuous (note that the other three species may show a fine whitish edge at close range).

**Latham's** — in folded wing, blackish primaries extend markedly beyond brownish secondaries and tertials (little difference between primaries and secondaries in the other three species).

Beware of worn feathers and ignore relationship of wing-tip to tail-tip.

#### Potentially useful characters.

These are probably insufficient to confirm identification and require much careful research before they can be accepted as guiding characters.

**Latham's flight** — typically erupts from cover and makes a fast get-away, constantly twisting from side to side, towering to some height and covering more than 100 metres.  
calls — explosive *shuk* as it leaves cover and some times again in flight; rarely silent.



Swinhoe's flight — sometimes short and weak, but also long, high escapes which are typically **slower and heavier** than Latham's, without zig-zag detail, i.e. **more direct**.

**calls** — often silent, but may give a more feeble version of Latham's call soon after rising.

**proportions** — Like Latham's but a little smaller in size.

**plumage** — some birds may show whitish sides to the tail, depending on moult.

Pin-Tailed flight — mostly short and weak, especially **direct** and often **without gaining much height**; most similar to Swinhoe's.

**calls** — reasonably distinctive *kee-erk*, or weak rasping, rather nasal *squak*; given on rising.

**proportions** — often **smaller** than the other species, though some variation; **not as chunky** as Latham's or Swinhoe's but with **stubby tail** giving uneven effect; **feet often trail conspicuously**.

**plumage** — may be **browner** than Swinhoe's on upper chest, with **less conspicuous stripes** on its back.

Obviously many of the above points are subjective and experience with all species through confirmed sightings may be essential for confirmation of these guidelines. A large sample of such sightings would be desirable to cater for non-typical behaviour. Strong wind, time of day and area of habitat will affect flight behaviour. Swinhoe's sometimes show toes **partially exposed** beyond the tail, but toes can be less or more exposed in accordance with the state of moult of outer tail feathers. There is some dispute concerning the nature of toe-trail with Latham's Snipe.

#### In the hand: outer tail feathers.

Complete tails of snipe provide diagnostic criteria for identification.

Common: **none** of the tail feathers are reduced to 'pins', i.e. feathers barely wider than their shafts.

Latham's: One outermost feather on each side is pin-like.

Swinhoe's: each side of tail has at least 4 or 5 pins, sometimes as long or longer than the broad feathers.

Pin-tailed: as many as 8 pairs of pins, usually very short, with outer ones extremely fine (less than 1mm wide).

Although this review may paint a hopelessly difficult picture for many observers, I would encourage you to **take up the challenge and make meticulous field-notes on your snipe**. Please submit details to the RAOU office so that we can attempt to build a clearer understanding of snipe in Australia.

R.J.

## **SOUTH-WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT**

**Report by Field Officer Roger Jaensch**

### **1. Information for Participants**

A reminder to all participants that the final recommended survey periods for this project are March 9-17 and May 11-19. I would like to encourage all observers to make particularly **thorough surveys** in March and May as there is a tendency for enthusiasm to wane toward the end of most long-term projects.

I will be approaching most observers in the next few months with **queries about specific sightings** that they have made. In order to make our information as useful as possible, I must scrutinise the data and verify all unusual species and curiously high counts. If you are asked to provide further information on your sightings, please do not be offended, as I am simply trying to **confirm** the entries.

Please note the Special Waterbird Surveys which are detailed in the Coming Excursions section of this newsletter. These will be a good opportunity to meet other 'wetfoots' and review the



A tribute must be paid to the resolute KRMB team, who have never failed to complete their waterbird counts at Peel Inlet, despite foul weather and countless fowl!

course and findings of the Project. Further details from Roger Jaensch on 364 6202 (wk).

### **2. Comments on the Wetland Printout.**

Hopefully each participant will have received a copy of the **printout** of 18 December 1984, for the wetlands which he or she has been surveying. A few may have missed out if their data had not yet been processed. Contact Roger at the office if you were expecting but did not receive the December printout, or if you have any queries.

Rod Vervest has compiled summary statistics for both the wetland and species printouts and several aspects deserve special comment.

**TABLE 1. WETLANDS WITH MORE  
THAN 40 SPECIES RECORDED**

Wetland	No of species	No of surveys
Alfred Cove/Pt. Waylen	67	160
Peel Inlet East & South	66	33
Forrestdale Lake	61	73
Thomsons Lake	58	112
Vasse Estuary	50	50
Benger Swamp	49	50
McLarty Lake	49	10
Grasmere Lake	46	27
Joondalup Lake	45	40
Wannamal Lake	45	44
Bambun Lake	44	51
Jandabup Lake	41	30
Towerrinning Lake Inlet	40	16

The summary indicates that three wetlands had more than 40 surveys but less than 40 species: these were Toolibin L (38 species), Como foreshore (34) and Wallering Swamp (33). Otherwise, Table 1 includes all wetlands with more than 40 surveys.

This clearly illustrates that **more surveys produce more species**. Alfred Cove is a good example, because Peel Inlet should really be at the top in view of its superior size and variety of habitat-types. Seven observers ensure that Alfred Cove is visited each week or thereabouts, whereas Peel Inlet is less accessible and requires many kilometres of walking to complete each survey, hence fewer surveys at Peel Inlet.

Other factors influence the ranking in Table 1, especially the quality or attractiveness of each wetland to waterbirds. In this regard, McLarty, Towerrinning and Grasmere Lakes show great potential for improving their positions.

For many months of the year, Jandabup and Bambun Lakes do not look impressive in terms of diversity of species. However, persistence by observers at these wetlands has led to surprisingly high species totals. Similar comments apply to rather small wetlands such as Wallering Swamp.

TABLE 2.  
WETLANDS WITH MORE THAN  
15 BREEDING SPECIES

Wetland	No. of breeding species	No. of surveys
Toolibin L.	21	40
Chandala L	19	32
Wannamal L	18	44
Forrestdale L	17	73

Statistics can of course be deceptive. Toolibin and Chandala Lakes partly owe their ranks to a high number of surveys in each case. However, these are well known breeding localities and were bound to inspire observers to visit frequently.

In some ways, Forrestdale and Wannamal Lakes lack the potential of Chandala and Toolibin as breeding localities. Hard work in frequent, thorough surveys have put Forrestdale and Wannamal within easy reach of the top of the table.

### 3. Comments on the Species Printout

Species recorded breeding in 50 or more wetlands comprise Aust. Shelduck (82), Grey Teal (74), Black Swan (70), Coot (68) and Pink eared Duck (50). Not suprisingly, these birds have conspicuous young or are conspicuous near their nests. They also figure prominently in TABLE 3.

TABLE 3  
SPECIES RECORDED AT MORE THAN 100 WETLANDS

Species	No. of wetlands recorded from	Minimum population in all wetlands in this study
Australian Shelduck	185	20,075
Grey Teal	177	24,402
Pacific Black Duck	170	7,509
White-faced Heron	165	921
Black Swan	142	7,327
Musk Duck	122	876
Eurasian Coot	119	10,955
Little Pied Cormorant	111	1,192

Two species with more than 10,000 individuals accountable in any one month, but not in Table 3, are the Banded Stilt (20,527 birds/55 wetlands) and Red-necked Stint (14,780 birds/47 wetlands).

The inclusion of the White-faced Heron and Musk Duck in Table 3 shows that widespread species are not necessarily abundant species.

Comparing Table 3 with the information on page 7 of *W.A. Bird Notes* No. 26 (June 1983), we see that the Shoveler and Black-winged Stilt have been replaced by the White-faced Heron and Little Pied Cormorant. The latter two species would have been picked up at numerous small wetlands visited for the first time in 1984.

## OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and will receive further scrutiny before they are considered for the 1984 and 1985 Bird Reports for W.A. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. Individual observers will be acknowledged in the Bird Reports.

This series mainly covers December 1984 and January-February 1985. Bold type indicates wetlands under study in the Waterbird Project. Shire names are given in brackets.

### 1. South-West & Eucla Divisions.

Southern Giant-Petrel — one fresh beach-washed bird, Eucla, 19/10 : white phase.

Australian Pelican

Darter

Great Cormorant

Pacific Heron

White-faced Heron  
Cattle Egret

Great Egret

Little Egret

Little Bittern

Australasian Bittern

Glossy Ibis

Royal Spoonbill  
Plumed Whistling-  
Duck

Black Swan

Freckled Duck  
Chestnut Teal

Hardhead

- one fresh juvenile, dead on beach near Mundrabilla, 21-24/10 ; dark phase.
- 40, 6/1, **Beverley Lakes** (Beverley), at the Weir.
- 12, three nests with young, **Gnorrbup Lake** (Jerramungup), January : nests were in Yate trees.
- 4, 9/1, on beach 30km W of Mundrabilla.
- 1, 28/12, **Lake Pleasant View** (Albany) : following severe peat fires at this swamp, several waterbirds of the open marshes have occurred here for the first time in the Waterbird Project.
- 133, **Lake Muir** (Manjimup) 14/12.
- 5, 2/12, **Joondalup** (Wanneroo) : rarely this many together in the South-West.
- 17, 4/12, **Unicup L** (Cranbrook).
- 6 nests with chicks, Tyrell's Yate Swamp (Esperance), 15/1 : all nests were in paperbarks amongst the yates.
- 57, 29/1, **Race-Course Lakes** (Esperance).
- nest with young, near Bunbury, 21/1.
- 6, 30/12, Peel Inlet.
- 3, 13/12, **Gingilup Swamps** (Augusta).
- two nests with eggs, **Kulunilup Swamp** (Cranbrook), 16/12.
- 1, nest with eggs, Wilabrup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes), 1/1.
- nest with a cold egg, Heath's Swamp (Esperance), 17/1 : probably first 'active' nest from this shire.
- 1, **Bokarup Swamp** (Cranbrook), 20/1.
- no records from **Benger Swamp** (Harvey) in 84-85 season, compared with up to 8 individuals in previous season.
- 1, **Neeranup Swamp** (Manjimup), 14/12.
- 1, **Lake Seppings** (Albany), 15/1 : the bird was catching lizards.
- 2, calling at **Thomsons L** (Metro), 21/1.
- 8, 15/7 **Joondalup** (Wanneroo).
- 9, 15/12, **Wallerling Swamp complex** (Gingin).
- 9, 1/1, McLarty (Murray).
- 21, 13/1, **Chandala** (Chittering) : largest count for this wetland — includes flying young?
- 1, 15/12 **Wallerling Swamp** (Gingin).
- 1, 23/7 **Joondalup** (Wanneroo).
- 2, 15/12, **Mungala L** (Gingin) : only one record in the south of the State in the Atlas.
- 55 nests in use, **The Broadwater** (Busselton), 11/8.
- 1, 7/1, **Herdsmen L** (Metro).
- 1, 31/12, **Bayswater Bird Sanctuary** (Metro).
- 11 plus ducklings, 31/12, **Cardiminup Lake**, near Bremer Bay.
- 72 plus 6 young, **Bambun L** (Gingin), 12/1.



- Square-tailed Kite — 1, 2/2, over tree-tops near Bunbury.  
— 1, 3/2, Kalamunda.
- Little Eagle — a pale phase bird in mallee 30km W of Mundrabilla, 11/1.
- Marsh Harrier — two young from this breeding season, **Thomsons Lake** (Metro), 19/12.
- Baillon's Crake — 1, nest with 4 eggs, Wilabrup Swamp (Bridgetown-Greenbushes), 1/1 : a late nesting date for this species?  
— 1, 25/1, **Shark Lake** (Esperance).
- Australian Crake — nest with eggs, Wilabrup, 1/1.
- Spotless Crake — 2, 10/2, **Sabina River** (Busselton).  
— 1, 16/2, **Chandala Swamp** (Chittering). Both are new localities for this species in the Waterbird Project.
- Black-tailed Native-hen — 50, 8/1, Dwardup L, near Bremer Bay.  
— 40, swamp near **Wheatfield L** (Esperance), January.  
— 19, **Beverley Lakes**, (Beverley) 29/1.
- Lesser Golden Plover — 1, 30/12, **Alfred Cove** (Metro).  
— 1, 22/2, **Forrestdale Lake**.
- Hooded Plover — 2 immatures at Coodanup, Peel Inlet, 1/1 : rare in this area.  
— 240, 9/2, **Lake Warden** (Esperance) : this total qualifies L Warden as the second most important site for this species in its entire range (L Gore = No. 1).
- Red-capped Plover — 263, 21/12, **Hinds L** (Wongan-Ballidu).  
— 553, **Beverley Lakes Channels** (Brookton), 11/1.  
— 431, **Big Bootine Swamp** (Gingin), 12/1.
- Eastern Curlew — 2, **Peel Inlet**, 10/2.
- Marsh Sandpiper — 5, 27/12, **Yellilup Swamp** (Jerramungup).
- Terek Sandpiper — 1, 21/11, Albany.
- Gallinago snipe* — 1, 25-30/1, **Shark Lake** (Esperance) : detailed field notes strongly suggest Latham's Snipe, which is possibly the rarest species of this genus in WA.
- Pectoral Sandpiper — at least 5, 23/2, **McLarty L** (Murray) : concentrations of this species are unusual in Australia.
- Little Stint — 1, **Forrestdale Lake**, 16/2 : two seen here in April 82 and also recently a bird at Eyre.
- Long-toed Stint — 2, 10/2, **Peel Inlet**.  
— 27, 23/2, **McLarty L** (Murray).
- Ruff — 1, 9-23/2, **McLarty L**.
- White-winged Tern — 1, 13/11, Mandurah.
- Arctic Tern — 1, 16/11, **Hamelin Bay** (Augusta) : a careful description has been submitted. See also records in last issue.
- Fairy Tern — 9 nests with eggs on a granite rock in a small **brackish lake** 6km from the coast (Esperance), 19/12.  
— 200, 13/1, **Baghdad L**, Rottnest.  
— 60, 60km W of Caiguna, 8/1.
- Cockatiel — 86 drowned at Mundrabilla Road-House in a salt-water pool (temp. 47°C+), 13/1.
- Budgerigar
- Shining  
Bronze-Cuckoo — 1, 20/1, **Dryandra** (Cuballing).
- Australian  
Owlet-nightjar — 1, 20/1, **Dryandra Forest**.
- White-throated  
Needletail — 1, 19/1, at the coast near **Mundrabilla** with Fork-tailed Swifts : Needletails are only occasionally seen in WA.
- Fork-tailed Swift — 1500+, 19/1, coast near **Mundrabilla**.
- Red-backed Kingfisher — several at Chowilla Do-line, 35km WNW of Eucla.
- Fairy Martin — 20+ nesting under a bridge at the Forrestdale Railyards, 16-20/1 : not a common species in the Metro area.
- Variegated Fairy-wren — at Preservation Area, Trigg (Metro), 16/1.
- Southern Emu-wren — 3, 23/12, Kelmscott.
- Pied Honeyeater — 7 on a flat 8km N of coast, 33km W of Mundrabilla, 20/1.
- Australian Magpie-lark — 2, Rottnest, 10/1 : last seen in 1936.
- Dusky Woodswallow — 1, Rottnest, January.
- Common Starling — 60, of which 44 were destroyed, in the Mundrabilla district, 8-26/1.
- Little Crow — 3 derelict on beach over 5km, near Mundrabilla, January.

## 2. Pilbara & Kimberley:

- Intermediate Egret — at least 6 nests, birds sitting, 6/1, **Lake Kununurra** : few if any breeding records of this species in WA.
- Black Bittern — nest with eggs near Golf Course at **Kununurra**, 30/12.
- Little Bittern — 3 nests with eggs, 7/1, **East Packsaddle Swamp** near Kununurra : possibly the first record of breeding in northern Australia. Note that this species was nesting in the south of WA at the same time.
- Garganey — 8, **Choomli Claypan**, on Ord/Parry floodplain near Wyndham, 5/1 : other State records have come from Kununurra and Yanchep.
- Red-backed  
Button-quail — 2, in short green grass between Wyndham and Kununurra.
- Red-chested  
Button-quail — 2, with the above species.
- Spotless Crake — common in *Typha* at the Kununurra swamps, 1/1 : formerly not recognised from the Kimberley except for one record from Mitchell Plateau.
- Eastern Curlew — 50, 15/2, **Dampier Salt**.
- Little Curlew — 2000, 29/12, floodplain-grassland near Wyndham.
- Wood Sandpiper — 300 to 400, **Choomli Claypan** near Wyndham, 31/12 : possibly the largest concentration of this species seen in Australia.
- Redshank — 4, 15/12, saltfields at Dampier : other localities in WA include Port Hedland saltfields, Coral Bay, Roebuck Bay.
- Gallinago snipe* — 11 seen in total, from 3 localities in N Pilbara, 15-16/2 : 4 near Peawah R had jizz of Latham's, three near Sherlock R. were probably Swinhoe's & another at Sherlock R was almost certainly Pin-tailed (see article in this issue).
- Asian Dowitcher — 15 at **Leslie Saltfields**, 14/2.
- Red-necked Phalarope — 12, **Leslie Salt**, 13/2 : this is the only site in Australia where groups of this species occur.

Oriental Pratincole	— 10,000, Leslie Salt, 14/2 : on wet tidal flat; not present on 13/2.
Common Tern	— many seen at Broome, 5/12.
Flock Pigeon	— 3, Kununurra Irrigation Area, 1/1 : not normally this far north in WA.
Barn Swallow	— 9, 7/1, Kununurra Diversion Dam.
	— 2, 13/2, Port Hedland Sewage Ponds.
	— 6, 15/2, intake gates, Dampier Salt.
	— 15, 16/2, Gap Ridge Sewage Ponds, near Karratha.
Yellow Wagtail	— 1, 5/12, Broome.
	— 1, 13-14/2, Port Hedland Sewage Ponds : race <i>simillima</i> , the common subspecies visiting Australia.

## MEMBER'S CONTRIBUTIONS

### EXMOUTH AND CAPE RANGE NATIONAL PARK.

A Black Falcon *Falco subniger* was noted on the west coast of the Park in low bush country on 21st March 1984. I observed the bird from my car, through binoculars, at a distance of only seven to eight metres. During the 30 seconds of observation I noted the yellow cere and feet and short stance which are characteristic of this species. Earlier in the day I had seen a Brown Falcon *Falco berigora* which differed from the Black Falcon in size, shape and plumage.

A nesting group of up to 25 Star Finches *Neochmia ruficauda* was studied in March-April in the town of Exmouth. A pair was also seen in bush south of the town and I heard reports of them occurring in the whole peninsula.

Tim Blake

### PACIFIC BLACK DUCK IN MARINE HABITATS

A study of ducks in marine habitats appears in *Emu* Vol. 43 (p.262), and it deals with Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal and Pacific Black Ducks. Reference is made to the fact that Pacific Black Ducks have mainly been studied in freshwater habitats. Indeed, I have been able to find few references to these birds in marine habitats apart from Frith's *Waterfowl in Australia*.

I have encountered Pacific Black Ducks in marine habitats fairly frequently in recent years. They may be seen, often in large numbers, on the sand spit at Duke Point near Augusta and these from time to time will venture onto Flinders Bay (Skilfully avoiding breaking waves). Other regular haunts in this district include Quarry Bay and Ringbolt Bay and I have sometimes seen Pacific Black Ducks in flight or swimming beyond the surf-line at Binningup and Myalup.

Eric Sedgwick

### MUNCHING MAGPIES

Once upon a time and the time was 1981 and the place was my front lawn in Salter Point, I was visited by a band of wandering Magpies in whose territory I dwell. On this occasion, there was a new member of the band, presumably born in the spring of 1980, which had half of the top mandible of its beak missing.

That was three years ago and she now wears the adult plumage of a female and has been named 'Half-beak' by me. To pick up food she has to lay her head sideways on the ground in order to reach it with the remaining part of her top mandible. Indeed, if you give it some thought, that is the only way she can pick it up.

In May I was visited by four magpies including Half-beak. I went inside to get them a handout: my wife had cut some rind from bacon rashers and had left about 1 centimetre of fat thereon. Taking it out to the magpies, I pulled the fat from the rind in strips of 10 to 15 cms and threw it onto the lawn.

Three of the magpies soon had a piece of fat in their beaks and each was belting it on the ground in order to 'kill' it before eating. It must have been lively fat because the 'killing' was somewhat prolonged, so much so that Half-beak decided to get

into the act. She went over to a piece of fat and began to 'kill' it but her lower mandible was hitting the ground and was 2 or 3 centimetres away from the fat. Poor Half-beak!

Jack Donohoe

### BIRDS OF A BOAT HARBOUR

Work began on the Bandy Creek Boat Harbour, near Esperance, in 1981 and the earthworks and dredging were completed by the end of 1983. Areas covered by sand excavated from the harbour were planted with cereal rye and are now reasonably stable. Many other areas are being stabilised naturally by the regrowth of hardy native coastal plants.

On a recent visit I was pleased to note the presence of a variety of birds which seemed quite at home in this changed environment. These included 20 Silver Gulls, six Pacific Gulls, six Crested Terns, two Caspian Terns, 20 Red-capped Plovers, one Sooty Oystercatcher, two Pied Oystercatchers and one Lesser Golden Plover. All these were on the sandy strip between the wharf area and the protective breakwaters. Numerous Richard's Pipits were in the cereal-cropped area. White-fronted Chats and Rock Parrots (about 30) were found wherever the native plants were taking over and Welcome Swallows and Fairy Martins were in small flocks out near the end of the breakwaters.

Austin Daw

### DODGEY DUCKS

On 14th January, 1985 while visiting Wheatfield Lake, close to Esperance, I disturbed a Pacific Black Duck with six ducklings. The duck with the ducklings in close attendance, hurried out to deep water where they were threatened by a Marsh Harrier.

The duck immediately flapped along the surface of the water leading the harrier away from the ducklings. When the duck was about thirty metres away, it dived. The harrier then returned to the ducklings and pursued each one in turn, until each dived. It then began hovering over the spot where the last duckling had disappeared, evidently waiting for the duckling to surface.

The duck, seeing the danger, promptly flew round behind the harrier and landed in the water immediately underneath it. It flapped off as before, taking the harrier with it, this time further away before diving. After this the harrier gave up and departed.

A few days later I again saw the duck, still with her six ducklings.

Austin Daw.

### CONTINUING THE SNIPE SAGA

While counting waders at the Boulder Sewage Ponds (30° 48'S, 121° 30'E) on 1 January 1985, I flushed a *Gallinago* species snipe from rank grass and weeds along a leakage drain. It flew only a short distance before coming to ground further along the drain. On a second flushing, it flew further, apparently alighting in dry saltbush country well away from water or mud.

Investigation on 6 January revealed a snipe hiding in the same place. It again initially moved only a short distance, then into dry country, whence it was flushed a third time. It then flew much further, and appeared to descend into salmon gum woodland.

The snipe was thus flushed five times in all. On no occasion did it give the *kek* call so characteristic of the Japanese Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii* which I have flushed many times from swamps in the Eastern Australian Highlands. It appeared to be a little smaller, and seemed to fly more slowly, and with less jinking (sharp twisting) than snipe with which I am familiar.

Two visits on 13 January failed to find the bird.

Does any reader know whether this behaviour is characteristic of one of the other snipe, *G. megala* or *G. stenura* perhaps?

W.J.L. Brooke

76 Ward St, Kalgoorlie.

See 'Field Identification', in this issue.

## FEARLESS FAIRY-WRENS

According to the *Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*, the Splendid Fairy-wren "differs from the Superb Blue Wren in that it does not readily accept human presence or take up residence in parks and gardens" and the writer suggests that this indicates a genetic difference between the two species.

My experience suggests otherwise. Three years ago, I watched a male Splendid Fairy-wren pecking at insects around the window of a friend's house near Cranbrook. Last October, a group of two male and two female Splendid Fairy-wrens appeared in my garden in Carmel. For the next few weeks they were frequently seen fluttering under the pergola and around the windows in search of insects. One of the male fairy-wrens often sat on my car and pecked at his image in the side mirror: he seemed quite unperturbed when I sat a few feet away to take his photograph.

In November, they built a nest in a May bush just outside the kitchen window and laid three eggs. Unfortunately, the nest was abandoned. The birds may have been frightened off by the neighbour's cat or by the noises in the kitchen. It was however a good attempt at breeding near human habitation. The fairy-wrens even used some strands of plastic in the construction of their nest.

Lee Hassan

Lot 22 Union Rd, Carmel, W.A. 6076.

## NOTICES

### 1. Rates for use of RAOU information

RAOU surveys rely heavily on the efforts of hundreds of volunteer observers who expend tremendous amounts of energy in gathering data — often on a monthly basis for several years. The RAOU cannot pay observers for their valuable contributions, but we can offer them better services and facilities if we obtain some form of income.

One avenue for finance is through the sale of our information. The RAOU is frequently approached by consultants and government departments for information about particular birds or places. Unfortunately, we do not always have data to offer, but the following is available:

- \* Atlas of Australian Birds (Melbourne)
- \* Wader surveys (Melbourne).
- \* Waterbird usage of Nature Reserves (Perth).
- \* Metropolitan Birds — reserves in Perth (possibly available in coming months)

The first two data sets are not available from the Perth Office and should be sought from Dr Stephen Davies, 21 Gladstone St., Moonee Ponds 3039, Vic. (Ph. 03 370 1272). Data at the Perth Office must be examined within the office and cannot be photocopied except in certain circumstances.

Rates for sale of RAOU information vary according to the purpose to which the data will be put:

- \* Commercial users (for profit) — \$35/hr.
- \* non commercial, non-member — \$20/hr.
- \* non commercial, RAOU member — \$5/hr.

### 2. Organisers and Leaders for excursions

With a booming membership and greater number of excursions, the RAOU in W.A. desperately needs organisers and leaders to boost its small core of helpers. Every excursion requires an *organiser* whose duties are:

- \* to investigate the excursion site **beforehand**, noting safe, adequate parking areas and principal landmarks;
- \* to **arrive early** on the day of the excursion, to provide the nucleus for cars and people to gather around;
- \* to **welcome** all attending, especially newcomers; to ask experienced bird-watchers to identify themselves (and lead small groups if the crowd is large);
- \* to get the ball rolling no later than 10 minutes after the advertised **starting time** and to announce and explain the time and place for each gathering on the day;
- \* to be the **leading car** if a convoy is needed.

Now this may sound complex, but that is not really the case. Organisers can liaise with the convenor of the Excursions Committee, Bruce Buchanan, for details of the route and site for a programmed excursion. **No special experience or knowledge or birds is required, just willingness to organise the troops.**

Of course, it is valuable if experienced bird-watchers can participate in excursions — especially if they are willing to help newcomers identify birds. If you are able to confidently **identify 15 common bush birds and 20 common water-birds**, then you will be very helpful to most newcomers.

Please write to the following address, or contact Bruce Buchanan at the next meeting or excursion, if you think you can help us in some way.

Bruce Buchanan,  
2 Jarman Avenue, Manning, 6152. W.A.

### 3. RAOU Library taking shape.

Special thanks must go to Diana Keeling for her help in preparing a catalogue of material in the RAOU's W.A. library. It is hoped that a joint computerised catalogue will shortly be established with the main RAOU library in Melbourne.

At present, the W.A. collection is in skeleton form: it does not even include Serventy and Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia!* Please ring Ron at the W.A. Office if you have any offerings of books, or care to donate cash towards the purchase of basic reference texts.

The Library is usually open to members from 9.00am to 5.00pm on weekdays, though it may be best to check first to see if staff will be in attendance.

### 4. Friends of the Swan River Wildlife Reserves.

A meeting will be held at 2.00pm at the antenna at Alfred Cove on Saturday 9th March. Bring gloves and mattocks etc. to eradicate exotic weeds. Enquiries to Steve Keeling 291 7592.

### 5. Art & Craft Exhibition — Naturalists' Club

The 1985 Art & Craft Exhibition will be held from 16-17th March at 65 Meriwa Street, Nedlands. The show opens at 10.00am each day and will include a bookstall, wildflower art, woodcraft, paintings etc. Parking is available at the corner of Clifton and Gordon Streets.

### 6. Foreshores and Waterways Protection Council.

A new Council to protect the State's ocean and inland foreshores and waterways has recently been convened, with Mrs. Shirley de la Hunty as President. The Council's major broad aims include maintaining free public access to foreshores and waterways in the face of threats posed by proposed developments, and protecting foreshores and waterways against uses or developments which adversely affect their general character, environment or ecology. The Council's immediate concerns are proposals for the old brewery site on Mounts Bay Road, the Applecross "Majestic Hotel" site, and the Burswood Island casino proposal.

For more information, contact the Secretary, Denise Vass, on 367 4301.

### 7. Project Pelican.

The Bird Observers Club and Gould League of Victoria are running a survey of the Australian Pelican, as some of you are aware. The data from the first month of counting, October 1984, is now being analysed. It is already apparent that there were few pelicans recorded in some of their usual haunts. Perhaps the big breeding effort at Lake Eyre had a bearing on this.

The organisers would be grateful for extra volunteers to assist in the next survey, in April 1985. Contact Mrs Ellen McCulloch, B.O.C. 183 Springvale Road, Nunawading, 3131. Victoria.

### 8. Victorian Bird Report — 1983.

The latest issue of this informative publication is now available from the Bird Observers Club at \$2.50 plus 70c. for postage (or \$4.50 for both 1982 and 1983 Reports, plus 70c. for postage).

A copy of each issue is held at the W.A. Office of the RAOU. The 1983 Report includes large prints of a Ruff and a Plains-wanderer.

#### 9. Birding Tours.

COATE'S TOURS invite you to share the companionship of other enthusiasts on their camping safaris to Walcott Inlet — Prince Regent River — Kimberley/Kakadu National Park — Mt Augustus — Flinders Range — Kalbarri/Murchison River — Fitzgerald River & Cape Le Grand — Perup & Mitchell River Reserves & Stirling Range National Park as well as their 3-day Ornitholiday.

The value packed programme is specially designed for those interested in wildflowers, birds, natural history and photography.

For Brochure, contact— Kevin & Yvonne Coate,  
21 Acanthus Road,  
Willetton. W.A. 6155.

#### 10. Subscriptions to "Western Australian Bird Notes"

##### ALL READERS PLEASE NOTE

Owing to the high cost of production of this publication and the coming termination of funds provided by the Waterbird Project, those wishing to receive *W.A. Bird Notes* from the March 1985 issue (inclusive) should send subscriptions for four issues in 1985 to the RAOU office in WA immediately.

Rates for 1985 — RAOU members \_\_\_\_\_ \$6  
— Institutions and organisations  
(unless involved in exchanges) \_\_\_\_\_ \$10

We regret that this change has become necessary and that we now cannot offer *Bird Notes* to non-members.

#### 11. Western Yellow Robin Sightings

Serventy and Whittell note in *Birds of Western Australia* (1976) that the Western Yellow Robin "visits the coastal plain near Perth (from the Darling Ranges) in the winter months . . ." and that "these visits have become less frequent in recent years". They further note that "though the bird used to appear regularly each year in Kings Park it has not been observed there since the winter of 1935."

Many reports of Western Yellow Robins have come from Metro Bird Project surveyors located within 1 to 2 km each of the Darling Scarp. I would be particularly interested to receive reports of Western Yellow Robins on or below the Scarp.

Ron Van Delft.

### COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

March 10 Excursion, Bibra & Yangebup Lakes.  
March 24 MBP walk, Alfred Cove.  
March 25 Meeting: Dr Weishu Hsu.  
March 30 Special Waterbird Survey, Dumbleyung Lake.

April 13 Excursion/MBP walk, Whiteman Park.  
April 20 Seabird Trip to the Shelf.  
April 28 Excursion/MBP walk, Kelmscott-Gosnells.

May 5 Excursion, John Forrest National Park.  
May 13 Special Waterbird Survey, Peel Inlet.  
May 19 MBP walk, Ferndale wetlands.  
May 25 Excursion, Chittering Valley.  
May 27 Meeting: Film night.

June 8 Excursion/MBP walk, Swanbourne & Lake Claremont.

### YOUR 1985 COMMITTEE

Chairman:	Barbara Hale	Committee:	Brian Collins
Vice-Chairman:	Rosalind Denny		John Hansen
Secretary:	Shapelle McNee		Bob Goodale
Treasurer:	Clive Napier		Joan Seabrook
			Geoff Shannon
			Mandy Silberstein

### EYRE COURSES

**17-23 March:** Bird Banding

**19-25 May:** Birding for Beginners

**11-17 August:** Eyre Bird Observatory

**1-7 September:** Bird Banding

**13-19 October:** Nests and Territories

**3-9 November:** Photography

**Early December:** Field Ornithology

### PUBLICATIONS

Publications and items for sale or ordering at the RAOU Office, general meetings, some excursions and other events.

☆ <i>The Atlas of Australian Birds</i>	\$49.00
☆ Overlays for the Atlas	\$ 6.00
☆ <i>Methods of Censusing Birds in Australia</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>Bird Report for W.A. — 1982</i>	\$ 5.00
☆ Report of the Middlesex Study Centre	\$ 5.00
☆ <i>A Pocket List of Australian Birds</i>	\$ 0.50
☆ <i>A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia</i> , by G. Pizzey (paperback)	\$14.00
☆ <i>The Birds of Australia</i> by K. Simpson	\$29.95
☆ RAOU ties (navy-blue or maroon with silver emus)	\$10.00
☆ RAOU emu badges	\$ 3.00
☆ <i>Western Australian Bird Notes</i>	\$1.50 for each issue

Brochures, forms and publications available free of charge at the RAOU Office:

- *Birding in WA*: New member brochure.
- programme of courses at Eyre; Eyre Brochure.
- Nest Record Scheme data forms.
- Raptor Survey Scheme data forms.
- *Articles of Association* of the RAOU.

Note that prices do not include postage — this will be charged to you if required.

### ADVICE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The editors of *W.A. Bird Notes* would like to ask those contributing written material to the newsletter, to note the following points:

- ★ copy should be typed with double spacing;
- ★ text should be broken into paragraphs, preferably containing not more than four or five sentences;
- ★ careful attention ought to be given to use of upper and lower case letters: eg. 'a flock of unidentified cormorants', or 'a flock of Great Cormorants';
- ★ a suggested method for recording dates and localities is eg. '11 May 1984, seven km SW of Moora' (ie. spell out one to nine, then use figures);
- ★ use the English Names for birds recommended by the RAOU for use in all publications about birds in Australia: these are given in the *Pocket List* available at the WA Office.

#### DEADLINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS:

for March issue — third Friday in January  
for June issue — third Friday in April  
for September issue — third Friday in July  
for December issue — third Friday in October