



Western Australian Bird Notes

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

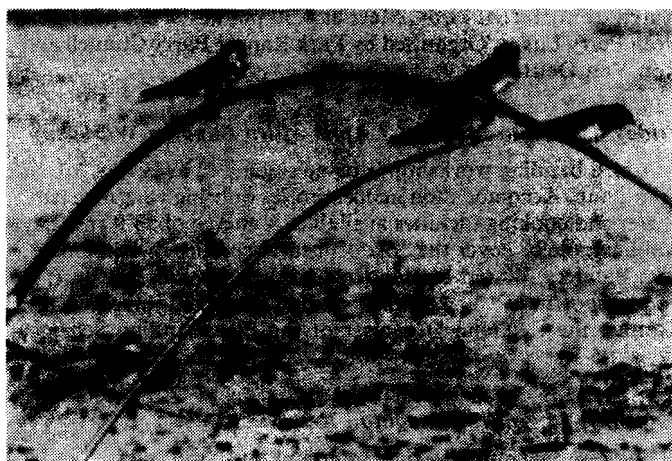
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BARN SWALLOW AT THOMSONS LAKE

A flock of about 200 swallows at Thomsons Lake on 8/1/86 included one bird which stood out as being different from all the rest. Pauline Clay, Clive and Glen Woodhead and I all noticed that this one bird was darker above than the Welcome Swallows and had a dark band separating a chestnut throat from a white breast and belly. On this basis I identified the bird as a Barn Swallow.

This was an exciting find as it seems to be the first record for the South-west of Western Australia. Apart from a single record in 1860, the Barn Swallow was not recorded in Australia until Peter Slater found it at Derby in 1960 (*West Aust. Nat.* 8:33-36). Since then it has been found to be regular migrant to northern Australia. The eastern subspecies of the Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica gutturalis* breeds in Mongolia, China and Japan and migrates to the south-east Asian region, with small numbers of birds reaching northern Australia. In recent years, birds have been seen further south, and in increasing numbers, e.g. about 200 birds seen at Broome by Brice Wells on 3 January 1986, plus regular sightings by others at Dampier and Port Hedland. It is not known whether the species is expanding its range or whether the greater number of experienced observers is resulting in the greater number of reported sightings.



Photograph by Barbara Porter

Barn Swallows have been recognised as regular visitors to northern Australia for many years. Reports from coastal towns in Western Australia have culminated in a recent sighting at Thomsons Lake in Perth.

Observations on the Thomsons Lake bird, which was present until at least 11/1/86, showed that the Barn Swallow is quite easy to distinguish from the Welcome Swallow. In comparison with the Welcome Swallow, the Barn Swallow shows much more contrast in its plumage. The bird we observed was darker and glossier above, and much whiter below than the Welcome Swallows. If seen at the right angle, the Barn Swallow could be distinguished in flight even up to 100 metres away. When seen closer, it was also obvious that the forehead and throat were chestnut, different to the paler rufous of the Welcome Swallows. The distinct black band separating the chestnut of the throat from the white of the breast was clear. The band was slightly less distinct in the centre, which is consistent with the bird being of the subspecies *gutturalis* of Barn Swallow. The tail of the Thomsons Lake bird was shorter than that of the Welcome Swallows, and was presumably in moult, as normally the Barn Swallow has the longer tail. When the tail was fanned, it showed larger white spots than in the Welcome Swallow.

This bird was quite vocal, and was singing much more than any of the Welcome Swallows. The Barn Swallow song was similar in pattern to that of the Welcome Swallows, but a little deeper in tone.

Next time you see a swallow, take a second look - you, too, may be lucky enough to find a Barn Swallow.

Allan Burbidge

THE GREAT DUCK COUNT

Waterbird enthusiasts in Western Australia have the opportunity to participate in an important new adventure - THE GREAT DUCK COUNT. This is an initiative of R.A.O.U. Waterbird Usage Studies, which recently received funding from the Department of Conservation and Land Management for waterbird studies over the next three years.

THE GREAT DUCK COUNT has two objectives:

- (1) to monitor annual changes in populations of waterfowl in Western Australia, and
- (2) to identify sites that are important as refuges for waterfowl.

Data collected for the recently completed South-West Waterbird Project confirmed the importance of many nature reserves for waterfowl (ducks, swans and coots), and led to recognition of the importance of other reserves that were not previously thought valuable for waterfowl. In THE GREAT DUCK COUNT, these sites will be visited, as well as known important sites not in reserves.

Participants will be supplied with maps (based on blocks of latitude and longitude) and will be asked to find and survey a sample of the wetlands shown on these maps, including farm

dams. This will ensure that we cover a representative sample of wetland types throughout south-western Australia, resulting in a more complete assessment of numbers than has ever been possible. Additional important wetlands will undoubtedly be discovered.

By repeating this comprehensive count each year, long-term changes in the population of each species can be monitored and appropriate conservation measures enacted if consistent declines are detected.

In 1986, the GREAT DUCK COUNT will be held from
8 March to 16 March
(incorporating two weekends)

Volunteers who have continued routine monitoring of waterbird usage of wetland nature reserves will be the backbone of the THE GREAT DUCK COUNT observer force. In March, these observers will be counting waterfowl and other waterbirds as part of their routine monitoring. In addition, the Waterbirds Officer and waterbird research officers of C.A.L.M. will participate.

To fill the many gaps in coverage, other participants - both country and city-based - will be required to join the 1986 GREAT DUCK COUNT. This is a once-off commitment, though repeat surveys of sites by the same observers in subsequent years would be most effective.

PLEASE RING OR WRITE TO ROGER JAENSCH
at the R.A.O.U. Office
(phone 09 364 6202 - 24 hrs)
if you think that you can assist us.

Previous experience with counting waterbirds would be helpful but is not essential. It is however imperative that observers be committed to obtaining TOTAL COUNTS of ducks, swans and coots present at the wetland on the survey day. This entails tackling wetlands that are not too difficult to cover (leave them to the Waterbirds Officer!), and devoting enough time and energy to fully investigate the wetland during the survey.

Counts of waterbirds other than ducks, swans and coots will be accepted for entry in the Waterbird Usage Data Bank but are not first priority in THE GREAT DUCK COUNT. Such information should be entered on standard waterbird usage data sheets which are available from Roger Jaensch.

Large estuaries, complex open lakes, water storage bodies and a selection of farm dams will be surveyed from the air, to supplement our ground coverage and incorporate wetland types not investigated in previous R.A.O.U. surveys.

Simple data forms will be used for recording counts. Data will be entered from these forms into a computer and a report will be published as soon as possible after the count period. Complimentary copies of the Report of THE GREAT DUCK COUNT will be made available to all participants.

Why concentrate on waterfowl? Ducks, swans and coots are among the most numerous and conspicuous of our waterbirds. Counts of waterfowl produce readily usable results that reflect the values of wetlands for fauna. Changes in waterfowl numbers may be indicative of changes in the health of a particular wetland or deterioration of wetlands throughout south-western Australia.

WOULD YOU MISS OUT
on the challenge & excitement of
THE GREAT DUCK COUNT?

Contact me NOW and indicate:

- * your address and phone numbers;
- * do you want to survey a particular wetland?
- if so, which wetland?
- * if willing to be directed to wetlands, how far would you be prepared to travel?

Roger Jaensch

COMING MEETINGS

In 1986, more meetings will be held than in previous years. Meetings will normally be held on the fourth Monday of each month, at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. The Centre is off Flynn Street, Wembley, near the intersection with Selby Street. Meetings will commence at 8:00 pm, though doors will generally be open soon after 7:30 pm. The June meeting will be earlier in the month than usual.

Two types of meeting have been planned for 1986. Meetings in March, June and September will have an invited speaker and a short session of business. The other ('informal') meetings will be chaired by various people who will organise the programme around a particular topic. The last third of each 'informal' meeting will be available for members to talk about their interests, observations or trips.

Monday 24 March - Dr Brian Collins : sunbirds

Monday 28 April - Informal : sound recording

Monday 26 May - Informal : seabirds

Monday 16 June - Roger Jaensch : waterbirds

Roger will review important discoveries made in R.A.O.U. surveys of waterbirds in Western Australia since 1981. Results of the 1986 Great Duck Count will also be presented.

COMING EXCURSIONS

Saturday 8 March - Boyagin Rock

In 1986 we plan to make several visits to the absorbing Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve. The Rock is approximately 110 km ESE of the Perth G.P.O. and is reached via the Brookton Highway. The reserve contains impressive stands of powder-bark wandoo woodland and probably supports similar bird species to Dryandra Forest. One of our objectives will be to compile lists of species found at particular sites in the different seasons.

Meet just past the intersection of the Brookton Highway and Canning Road, Karragullen at 07:30.

Saturday 8 March to Sunday 16 March - THE GREAT DUCK COUNT

See full details elsewhere in this issue.

Sunday, 16 March - Bold Park

Bold Park encompasses some excellent bushland, as well as Perry Lakes which are renowned for their birdlife. Following an evening barbeque, this excursion will carry on into the night in search of nocturnal birds. Meet at 4.30 pm at the car park between Perry Lakes. Organised by Park Ranger Barry Connell and Ron Van Delft.

Friday 4 April to Monday 7 April - Bird Banding Workshop

A bird banding workshop is being organised at Perup, NE of Manjimup. Accommodation in dormitories or bring your own tent. Water and cooking facilities available. A charge of \$3.00 per day will be made to cover the cost of insurance, hire of equipment, etc.. Banders, Would-be-Banders and their families welcome. A good opportunity to learn bird banding in relaxed surroundings. Contact the Regional Organiser of the Bird Banding Scheme, Perry de Rebeira, 12 Glenwood Ave, Glen Forrest 6071.

Saturday, 12 April - Claughton Reserve

The reserve combines river, wetland and bush habitat and a good number of species is usual. Meet at the Swan River end of Katanning Street, Bayswater at 8.30. Leader - Tony Crookes.

3-11 May - Eyre trip

See notes under 'Eyre Bird Observatory'.

Saturday, 3 May - Blue Gum Lake

This excursion is primarily for Young Ornithologists but all are welcome at another interesting "inner" metropolitan water and bush-bird area. Identification of birds will be the prime objective and high school aged children will be particularly welcome. The lake can be reached by bus from Perth Stand 34, route 105 departing 0908 changing to route 108 at Booragoon at 0930, getting off near the corner of Canning and Moolyteen Roads. The route 108 bus leaves Blue Gum Lake about 1100 for a return to Perth arriving there at 1147. For those with own transport meet at the Moolyteen Road end of the lake at 09.45. Leader - Ron Van Delft.

Saturday, 10 May - Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve

Meet at the reserve's carpark on the north side of Russell Road, Success (between Hammond Rd and Pearse Rd) at 3:30 pm. Always a rewarding area, reliable for Red-capped Parrots, Whistling Kites and other bush and lake birds.

Sunday 15 June - Point Walter Reserve

The Point Walter Reserve covers a large area and has been surveyed by several metro-birders each of whom is familiar with a section and the territories of birds within them. Meet at 08.30 at the car park in Burke Drive just past where Carroll Road leads off Burke Drive.

Sunday, 15 June - seabirds

From vantage points on *terra firma* (instead of boat afloat) to see skuas, petrels, jaegers and albatrosses. Meet at the west sea end of North Mole, Fremantle at 8:00 am. Leader - Steve Keeling.

CAMPOUT : 22 - 28 June - Kathleen Valley

A week long camp is being organised at Kathleen Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, north of Agnew. Accommodation in the old shearing shed; bring own cutlery, crockery, sleeping necessities. Tents are not permitted. Plenty of water available. It is planned to organise food on a communal basis. Interested persons give your name and telephone number to the R.A.O.U. Office. Leader - Geoff Shannon.

MEETING REPORT

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The RAOU W.A. Group Annual General Meeting was held on 20 January 1986 at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. A good attendance of about eighty members elected the following Committee for 1986.

Chairman:	Geoff Shannon
Vice Chairman:	Rosalind Denny
Treasurer:	Clive Napier
Secretary:	Shapelle McNee
Committee:	Mandy Bamford
	Brian Collins
	Bob Goodale
	Barbara Hale
	John Hansen
	Brian Wilson

EXCURSION REPORTS

McDOUGALL PARK - 19 January 1985

The day had been hot but it was nice and cool by 5.30 pm at the park. A casual stroll around turned up an impressive number of species and the lake provided us with a surprise. Apart from there being no mosquitoes at the barbeque following the walk, two Black-fronted Plover paraded at close range before us. Har-

dhead, Willy Wagtail and Little Black Cormorant also showed themselves off.

About three quarters of the 30 or so people who came for the walk stayed on for the barbeque. We left about 7.30 pm leaving others to help consume the contents of a sherry bottle being passed around!

Thanks to Joy Fleay who ensured the smooth flow of the evening's programme.

Ron and Catherine Van Delft.

TWERTUP (Fitzgerald River National Park) - 24 to 27 January 1986

On this bus trip eighteen members enjoyed the comforts of Kevin Coate's air-conditioned coach on the seven-hour journey via Jerramungup. Once arrived at the Twertup Field Studies Centre we appreciated Kevin's efficient catering, his spotting skills and his botanical knowledge as well.

Among the 61 species seen within 7 km of the Centre, were two new records (subject to vetting) for the Park:- Gilbert's Whistler (two adults and one young) were clearly seen and Regent Parrots, on two occasions. Twenty four Fork-tailed Swifts were seen flying over the centre and breakaway on a clear, fine afternoon. We were pleased to have frequent glimpses of Shy Hylacola and close-ups of the Southern Scrub-robins. Some saw a Malleefowl, an Australian Owlet Nightjar was flushed from a hollow tree and a Spotted Nightjar from a crevice. A male Blue-breasted Fairy-wren was seen feeding an immature Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, and the nest and eggs of a Brush Bronzewing were found. Eight species of honeyeaters were seen feeding noisily in the moorts (E. platypus) and some of us had their first sight of Purple-gaped Honeyeaters.

The clear, hot days were spent in long walks on the sandtracks around the Centre yet certain ladies emerged cool and elegant at the end of the day after 'bush bathing' in pudding basins and pint-pots. The company was most congenial and old-world courtesy never failed; even when we trampled over each other to have a good look at Southern Emu-wrens in the heath. An apologetic 'I do beg your pardon' was overheard!

There was general hilarity and a few grazed knees as we stumbled over the scree-covered slopes each night with our spotlights looking for honey possums. On the last evening a beautiful full moon shone over the spongolite cliffs as Kevin's delicious damper rose in the coals for our supper, concluding a most pleasant and relaxing weekend.

Diane Beckingham

VASSE ESTUARY SURVEY - 24 & 25 January 1986

This rather hastily-organised event was undertaken in difficult conditions which understandably contributed to the low number of participants. During the survey, temperatures were in the low forties in the water-bag and evening sea-breezes were elusive.

Nevertheless, the seven who ventured forth were treated to a spectacular assembly of waterbirds in the drying Vasse and Wonnerup Estuaries. A total of 33,000 waterbirds was seen, most birds being congregated between the mouths of the Sabina and Abba Rivers. A higher tally of individuals was only recorded once during the Waterbird Project (1981-85) - 41,000 at Peel Inlet in November 82.

Sixty species were identified over two days. The majority were seen on the Saturday which meant that a rare situation arose - counts had to be entered on three data sheets! Observers split into three groups to tackle sections of the wetland simultaneously.

Our campsite beside the outlet channel was a particularly rewarding spot. A family of two adult Buff-banded Rails with two fluffy black chicks probed the mud at close range and Fork-tailed Swifts drifted low overhead, borne up by a hot NE breeze. We awoke one morning to find Great Egrets lining the edges of the channel for as far as we could see. Sacred Kingfishers fed juveniles in a grove of Casuarinas and Grey Butcherbirds chortled melodiously.

Highlights of the waterbird survey included abundant species such as the Grey Teal (7000), Black-winged Stilt (5000), Red-necked Avocet (4000), Eurasian Coot (4000) and Sharp-tailed

Sandpiper (2300). The tally of 170 Great Egrets did not exceed the previous best Vasse count (237) but the total of 120 Yellow-billed Spoonbills has probably never before been achieved in surveys in south-western Australia. A single Royal Spoonbill was sighted.

An impressive total of 23 species of waders was realised! Rarer species included the Pectoral Sandpiper (3) and Black-tailed Godwit (18). We were astonished to make a record South-West tally of 61 Wood Sandpipers, most being found in stony marsh along Malbup Creek. A strong-flying *Gallinago* snipe was flushed six times: this was one of three sightings on the coastal plain this summer.

Perhaps the most important discovery was of 44 Long-toed Stints scattered in mud with short grass or stunted samphire in Vasse Estuary. Had we been a week or two earlier, greater areas of this typical Long-toed habitat would have been available. This tally was the third highest ever made in southern Australia for this secretive wader.

As a result of more than 60 surveys by regular observers and this recent survey, the Vasse-Wonnerup Estuarine System now stands as one of the five most important wetlands in southern W.A. A follow-up visit on 1 February added the Ruff and two other species to bring the overall total to 71 species - this has only been exceeded at Alfred Cove (72 species).

Most importantly, 19 species listed in the Japan-Australia Migratory and Endangered Birds Agreement have now been found at the Vasse. Also, more than 10,000 ducks have been counted at the Vasse in two successive years: if this proves to be an annual event, the Estuary would satisfy a criterion for nomination as a Wetland of International Importance.

Roger Jaensch

NEERABUP NATIONAL PARK - 8 February 1985

I would rather go birdwatching than shopping on a Saturday morning and it seems that at least 15 people agreed with me on 8 February. We met by the shore of Lake Joondalup and headed for Neerabup National Park. Between us we saw 32 species including White-backed Swallows and Splendid Fairy-wren.

Neerabup seems to be a place well worth a visit. On the Thursday prior to the excursion I saw a flock of about 70 White-backed Swallows, but alas only two or three were there on Saturday. Geoff Shannon had the good fortune to see a Golden Whistler feeding young and a quail. During the first six months of the Perth Metropolitan Bird Project only one record of the Golden Whistler was noted on the Swan Coastal Plain, although they are common in the Darling Range.

The party then traveled north to Nowergup Lake whose western shore lies in the Nowergup Nature Reserve which abuts Neerabup National Park. Almost all types of duck found in W.A. were present, as well as Red-necked Avocet, one Greenshank, Black-fronted Plover and a flock of about 12 Banded Stilt!

By the time Nowergup Lake had been surveyed it was getting hot, so the final leg, wading through the mud to see the waders at Jandabup, was abandoned.

A pleasant time was had by all and a warm welcome to some members of the newly formed Wanneroo Naturalists Club who attended.

Ron and Catherine Van Delft

HARTFIELD PARK - 9 February 1985

A small group of early risers assembled at Hartfield Park, Forestfield at 7 am on Sunday the 9th of February for a walk around the golf course.

I am pleased to report that most of the birds recorded at the location were seen and several new ones were added. The total species list was 26.

For some reason the early morning golfers stayed at home, so the birders had an uninterrupted stroll down the course.

It was noticeable that many of the birds seemed tame and some close up observations were made. Perhaps the birds are used to golfers more interested in birdies than birds!

David Row

CONSERVATION SUB-COMMITTEE

Our last issue reported the appointment of Brian Wilson as Convenor of a Conservation Sub-committee. The aim is to draw up a list of places of ornithological importance in W.A. in the categories of top, middle and lower.

Brian is making contact with appropriate Government Departments. From the conservation view point the protection of Crown land is potentially easier than of private property but important bird areas in each are required, particularly as private property owners are increasingly aware of their role in conservation.

Please send in your suggestions with brief reasons for your nomination either to the RAOU office or direct to Brian Wilson, 46 Farrant Street, Gooseberry Hill 6076.

Brian has commenced a large and difficult undertaking which when complete will be of great value to all bird watchers. Suggestions please.

METRO BIRDER

A special edition of Metro Birder News was recently sent to all metro birders with some rather exciting news. The RAOU has succeeded in obtaining a publisher for a guide to birdwatching in Perth and more importantly some 90% of the funds required to write and publish it.

University of Western Australia Press will publish the guide and we hope to have it selling for between \$7.00 to \$9.00 before Christmas.

A full list of those who contributed financially to funding the writing and publishing of the guide will appear in it. However, special thanks must be extended to those who have contributed to date. These include Mr Dallas Dempster, the University of Western Australia Press, the Department of Conservation and Environment, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Bird Observers Club, the Australian Bird Environment Fund and many generous people who have sponsored pages.

Is it most heartening to see Australia's two major bird organisations, the Bird Observers Club and the RAOU giving support to the Perth Metropolitan Bird Project.

It is hoped that publication will raise awareness of the sites and value of good bird habitat in the Metropolitan area and foster a caring attitude by the public and the government organisations responsible for the sites. Conservation of bird habitat depends on people. Publication should also help stimulate interest in birdwatching and the RAOU.

There is still plenty of work to be done. In particular, if any RAOU member has MAPPING SKILLS please give me a call. The mapping can be done at home during weekends and involves drawing maps from aerial photographs using a standard legend.

The RAOU office volunteers have been doing an excellent job. Work that I thought would take days has been done in one or two mornings! I hope that this trend will continue as an estimated 800 forms require to be entered into the computer and checked.

The analysis of the 2000 computer forms sent in by metrobirders over the last twelve months will provide an important insight into bird distribution and movement in Perth. The preliminary analysis, reported in the September edition of W.A. Bird Notes produced a number of surprises but also left many tantalising questions which will only be answered by more data.

A full account must await the guide, but it is hoped to have more items of interest in the next WA Bird Notes.

Ron Van Delft
(Project Officer)

THREE PARK SEARCH

This year's Three Park Search provided interesting insights into human behaviour as well as interesting information on birds!

Eight teams participated and reported a total of 119 species between them.

TABLE ONE - Number of visiting teams and number of species for each site.

Site	No of visiting teams	No of species
Yanchep	1	16
Thompsons Lake	2	60
Herdsmans Lake	7	57
Bold Park	3	56
Kings Park	2	41
Alfred Cove	7	60
Kalamunda N.P.	2	29

Table One shows the number of teams that surveyed each site and the total number of species seen at each. Herdsmans Lake and Alfred Cove proved the most popular areas, each having seven of the eight teams try their luck there. Thompsons lake looks good for next year - with just two teams recording as many species as seven teams at Alfred Cove!

The information needs to be read with an understanding of how the rules affected team behaviour. The one team that went to Yanchep had already visited good wetland habitat and therefore totally ignored Loch Mc Ness. Not a single waterbird - not even a Black Swan - appears on the list for Yanchep! Another theory proposes that the avoidance of wetland habitat by this team was related to the \$2.00 entry charge to visit Loch McNess. This theory seems unlikely as, according to Bill Oddies' Little Black Bird Book, even barbed wire fences and antagonistic rangers do not deter a determined birder.

Despite an enormously low probability, two teams visited the SAME three parks! Team A recorded 94 species and won the day, whilst team B scored 69 species - a difference of 25 species. Although some of the 25 extra species seen by team A were species that are hard to find, team B had the misfortune to miss several common species. For example a Port Lincoln Ringneck, a species that team A saw at Alfred Cove.

As the list for the top 10 birds observed is very similar to last year, this year, in Table Two I have listed the birds which were only recorded by one team. If your team saw any of the species noted below, further details would be appreciated as the species noted are generally uncommon in Perth!. Please remember that for many of the sites named below the boundaries allowed extended beyond those normally considered as the site boundaries.

TABLE TWO - Species recorded by one team only.

Species	Site
Spotless Crake	Bold Park
Darter	Kings Park
Lesser Golden Plover	Alfred Cove
Wood Sandpiper	Bold Park
Marsh Sandpiper	Alfred Cove
Sanderling	Alfred Cove
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	Bold Park
Little Egret	Bold Park
Little Bittern	Bold Park
Australian Shoveler	Bold Park
Little Eagle	Yanchep
Whistling Kite	Herdsmans Lake
Australian Hobby	Alfred Cove
Australian Kestrel	Herdsmans Lake
Rainbow Lorikeet	Kings Park
Pallid Cuckoo	Kalamunda N.P.
White-backed Swallow	Yanchep
Dusky Woodswallow	Kalamunda N.P.
Mistletoebird	Kalamunda N.P.
Chesnut-breasted Mannikin	Herdsmans Lake
Red-browed Firetail	Kalamunda N.P.

The Three Park Search will be repeated next year, with a slight change to the rules. Next year the total number of species seen at each site be added up to determine the winning team. This will result in complete, usable lists for each park.

Ron Van Delft

BOP WATCH

Have you ever struggled to keep alert while travelling the long country roads in our State? Well the R.A.O.U. has undertaken a new project that will relieve boredom and fatigue for the touring birdo - BOP WATCH! Enclosed with this newsletter is a supplement that explains a simple but very useful study on our Birds of Prey. No doubt you've noted quite a few Black-shouldered Kites on some country trips but none on later trips along the same route. BOP WATCH serves to record these changes in a simple, systematic fashion in order that we can better understand and protect our birds of prey.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact -

ALLAN BURBIDGE - P.O. Box 312, Wanneroo 6065. Phone: 09 306 1642

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

NEW WARDENS AT EYRE

Last evening, sipping our pre-dinner drinks on the verandah, we gazed at the awesome snowy white sand dunes towering into a sky of gentle colours and were captured by the magic of Eyre. The previous hectic week of packing, renting our house and rushing about doing last minute business and saying goodbyes faded painlessly into the past.

Jan Rhodda, Ben Carr and Rose Farrell very kindly and ably acted as relief wardens for the period between the departure of the previous wardens Nick Dymond and Mary Stewart and our arrival.

Our first week is proving to be a very busy settling in period. We have now mastered the twice daily weather observations, besides the nervousness of broadcasting on the Royal Flying Doctor Radio and the inevitable problem of identifying the clouds. Needless to say 'cloud free days' are now on our list of dreams.

Our first two guests, Bill Graham and Liz White, after working all day on dune stabilization are cheerfully supplying us with their company and appetites enabling us to try out our skills as the hosts and cooks of Eyre.

We wish to express our sincere appreciation to our fellow R.A.O.U. members for their support and encouragement during this period of decision and change for us and especially those who joined us at Diane Beckingham's home for farewell drinks.

We look forward to making all members and their friends welcome at Eyre in 1986.

Jan and Rob Hill

EYRE COURSE PROGRAM

All courses will run from Sunday afternoon to the following Saturday morning. Cost of courses is \$150 which includes food, accomodation and transport. Families are most welcome.

Birding for Beginners

Leader: Steve Keeling

Date: 30 March to 5 April 1986 (Easter)

The course is designed to give beginners a knowledge of how to identify birds. The use and care of binoculars, note-taking in the field and proper use of reference guides and books will be covered. Activities will also include searching for the rare Eyre Throistle-toed Easter Rabbit which should be nesting at this time of year. Come along and not only learn about birds but also have fun.

RAOU WA Group Excursion to Eyre
Date: 3 to 11 May 1986

A chance for birdos from the west to go as a group to Eyre to catch up on the ever growing bird list. If you haven't been to Eyre yet - it's a must. If you have been, then here's the excuse to visit again. Special rates apply.

Eyre's Furry Friends
Leader: Doug Watkins
Date: 22 to 28 June 1986

Birdos need to broaden their interests! Come to Eyre for the week and have personal introductions to some of the mammals of the southern Nullarbor and Roe Plain. Activities will include looking at cave bats and "drift lining" for Pygmy Possums and Hopping Mice. Why stay at home!

**BRIEF DETAILS OF COURSES FOR
SECOND HALF OF 1986**

History of Eyre Telegraph Station
Leader: Bill Graham
Date: 27 July to 2 August 1986

Art Workshop with Donna Reid
Date: 21 to 27 September 1986.

Drawing and painting the unique scenery, flora and fauna of Eyre. Concentrating mainly on acrylic painting, ink and pastel.

Birds for Beginners
Date: September 28 to October 4 1986

Courses on photography and field ornithology are also planned for the second half of 1986.

For further information about the above courses, please contact the Warden at Eyre Bird Observatory. Phone : 090 393 450.

ROSTRATULA AT VASSE

C.A.L.M. District Manager at Harvey, John Clarke was privileged to observe and handle one of the State's least-observed waterbirds during a recent stroll near Busselton. On the warm evening of 4 February 1986, John was walking beside the Vasse River when a bird flushed from a dry section of swamp about 20 metres from the water's edge. Despite negotiating a grove of paperbarks, the bird fell foul of a barbed-wire fence.

Having a camera handy, John took a snap shot of the stunningly-marked bird before disentangling it. Although it uttered low hissing noises, the bird was largely unharmed and flew away without difficulty.

Considering the dark hood, white eye-mark, long yellowish bill and brilliant golden spots and bars on the upperparts of the bird, John Clarke correctly concluded that it was a female Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*. Males of this species are paler on the head and upper chest than females and males also lack the finely-barred greenish secondary coverts of the female.



Photograph by John Clarke

This female Painted Snipe became briefly entangled in a fence on the edge of the Vasse Estuary, near Busselton. A rarely-observed species in Western Australia, the Painted Snipe frequents wet grassland and low swamp vegetation.

Painted Snipe range widely in Africa, southern and eastern Asia and Australia. A smaller species occurs in South America. Few sightings of Painted Snipe have been made in Western Australia. Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* (1976) list old records from Perth (Herdsman Lake), Armadale, Pinjarra, Moora and Bunketch, and single records from the Pilbara and northern Goldfields are mentioned in The Atlas of Australian Birds. The Atlas also cites specimens from Derby pre-1900 and reports from the same area in the 1950's. Several sightings were made in the lower Ord River District during the Atlas period. W.A. Museum regional lists include sightings at Wyndham (1909), Carnarvon (1963) and Paraburdoo (1974).

The Vasse sighting is probably the first in southern W.A. for more than 30 years. In south-eastern Australia, Painted Snipe are often found in short wet grass or rush, tall samphire or areas of tussocks. This type of cover is prevalent in the Busselton wetlands, particularly in the SW part of the Vasse Estuary.

Regarded as a nomadic species in Australia, the Painted Snipe could be seen at almost any shallow wetland in the State. Though its behaviour is not well known, it is considered to be mainly a crepuscular and nocturnal feeder.

Perhaps the easily-pronounced generic name *Rostratula* would be better used as the English name of this bird, to reduce confusion between painted snipe and the dissimilar true *Gallinago* snipe. Admittedly, both painted snipe and true snipe are waders that inhabit marshy areas and have cryptic plumage, but thereafter the similarities diminish.

R.J.

WATERBIRD USAGE STUDIES

NEW PROJECTS, 1986-88

The new R.A.O.U. - C.A.L.M. contract for waterbirds studies in the period 1986-88 has now been signed. Funds from this contract will cover much of the expense of maintaining the R.A.O.U. Office at Canning Bridge, as well as supporting new research initiatives. These projects have been foreshadowed in previous issues of this newsletter.

The first activity to take place will be the GREAT DUCK COUNT (see article earlier in this issue), though it may well be underway by the time this note reaches you.

Next in our 1986 schedule will be an expedition to remote wetlands in our State. We have tentatively elected to visit the Kimberley Division to count waterbirds using Lake Argyle, in late September 1986. An article on the waterbirds of this enormous wetland appeared in Issue 33 of *W.A. Bird Notes*. Other areas such as Gregory Salt Lake could be incorporated in this expedition, but time, funds and resources will determine the final itinerary. Alternative sites closer to Perth (e.g. Lake McLeod) will be censused if difficulties preclude the Kimberley trip.

I would like to hear from anyone interested in participating in the remote wetland expedition in 1986. We require people skilled in field mechanics, catering, piloting light aircraft and off-road driving as well as experienced observers. A certain amount of camping equipment (e.g. water supply) might be provided, but otherwise participants will need to be financially self-supporting. Size of the expeditionary group will be kept small if resources are limited.

The objective of the exercise will be to assess the importance of the remote wetland for use by waterbirds. Ultimately, remote sites could be nominated for inclusion in the List of Wetlands of International Importance, if the criteria for nomination are satisfied.

SEEDING THE CLAYPIT

Alcoa and the R.A.O.U. have been rehabilitating a clay extraction pit near Baldavis to make it more attractive to waterbirds. Planted shrubs and rushes have shown steady growth and the pit's lake has a rapidly-increasing list of species recorded. Great Crested Grebes and Red-kneed Dotterels were among the birds seen on a recent visit.

An effective method for establishing shrubs at the margins of lakes involves casting seed-bearing tea-tree *Melaleuca* branches into the water. The seed pods release their seeds which then come to rest at various levels on the lake-shore.

Organisers would like to try using this method at the clay-pit lake in late March. Anyone who might enjoy tackling this worthwhile exercise should contact me immediately.

R.J., R.A.O.U. Office, Canning Bridge.

CRAKE TRAPPING - 1986

Crakes and rails were trapped at Thomsons Lake from 4-13 January 1986. Water-levels were falling rapidly and little water remained in the rushland by the end of the second week in January. With the invaluable assistance of Clive and Glen Woodhead and Allan and Julie Burbidge, 22 crakes were captured, studied and released. Seventeen were banded - trapping and banding exercises were carried out under permit.

Although similar numbers of birds were caught in two previous seasons, none were recaptured in the 1986 exercise - scarcely surprising! Nevertheless, the ratios of species caught gave insight into the relative abundances of crakes at the lake in January 86: 14 Spotless Crakes, two Australian Crakes and six Baillon's Crakes were captured. Species ratios in crakes sighted near the traps were similar, though the ratio of Australian to Baillon's Crakes was closer to 1:1. A Buff-banded Rail was seen near the trap area.

As in previous exercises, many of the captured birds were juveniles. Seven of the trapped Spotless Crakes were juveniles (e.g. with feathers partly in sheaths) - one was a fluffy black runner. Two Baillon's Crakes were juveniles. These results confirm the importance of Thomsons Lake for breeding by crakes.

PACKS OF PECS

Observers around the State have reported unusually high numbers of Pectoral Sandpipers in the 1985-86 wader season. This is possibly due both to increased expertise in identifying these birds and also to greater numbers visiting Australia this season. Basic details of sightings are as follows:

- 9, 9/2, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
- up to 4, 19/12/85-12/1/86, Forrestdale L.
- up to 4, 26/1-2/2/86, Thomsons L.
- 12, 1/2, Mealup L.
- 5, 15/1, McLarty L.
- 3, 25/1, Wonnerup Estuary.
- 27, 13/1, Gore L., Esperance..

Detailed descriptions would need to accompany these records before they would be accepted for publication in a journal of ornithology. The Esperance birds were scattered in smaller groups in flooded samphire.

Wader enthusiasts should take particular care with identifying 'Pecs'. Some Sharp-tailed Sandpipers show longer-than-average bills and many have pale bases to their bills and neatly de-marcated chest streaks. One of the safest features of the Pec is the dark mark in front of (not beyond) the eye, coupled with striking white stripes on the sides of the dark (not rufous) crown and forehead. Getting close views is essential!

FURTHER GALLINAGO SIGHTINGS

As in the past two years, *Gallinago* snipe have again been seen in south-western Australia. In addition to the Dunsborough bird in late 1985 (see last issue), a single *Gallinago* was found at Vasse Estuary on 25 January 1986 and another at Bibra Lake on 28 January. These were found by Mal Lewis, R.J. and Michael Craig respectively.

The Dunsborough bird was tentatively identified as a Latham's Snipe on the basis of folded primaries being longer than folded secondaries (the bird was seen closely while feeding) and a long tail tipped boldly with white. The Vasse bird flew with great power and speed and called strongly each time it was flushed (features of Latham's) but showed feet trailing beyond the tail (a feature of Pin-tailed Snipe) in some side views. Close confines precluded good views of the Bibra Lake bird, but its flight was weaker

and slower than either of the first two birds (unlike typical Latham's) and its calls were more typical of a Pin-tailed Snipe (R.J.) - but no trailing toes were seen.

Having viewed all three birds, I would conclude that at least two species of *Gallinago* snipe were involved in these records. Sightings in the south of the State over the last three years have resulted in a confirmed record of Pin-tailed Snipe and several tentative records each of Latham's and Pin-tailed Snipes. Latham's Snipes could reach the SW by migrating to Australia through the North-West or by over-shooting southern S.A. after travelling down the East Coast. The Swinhoe's Snipe occurs in the Kimberley and Pilbara and could also reach the SW.

I would encourage observers to avoid jumping to conclusions on the identity of snipe they have seen, but instead to take careful notes while studying the bird in flight and on the ground for as long as possible. For notes on identification of *Gallinago* snipe, see Issue 33 of this newsletter.

Roger Jaensch

OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in R.A.O.U. Reports or in technical journals. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. The *Atlas of Australian Birds*, Serventy & Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) of the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the summer of 1985-86. Shire names are given in brackets.

Please send details of sightings to 'The Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the R.A.O.U.

1. Southern W.A. (South-West & Eucla)

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Antarctic Prion | — 1, 3/9, dead at Alfred Cove (metro). |
| Darter | — 16, 21/12, Gnornbup Sw (Jerramungup): a small breeding colony was active. |
| Pacific Heron | — 17, Sep 85, Jandabup L (Wanneroo). |
| | — 25, 22/12, Yellilup Sw (Jerramungup). |
| Cattle Egret | — 1, Dec 85, Bengier Sw (Harvey). |
| Great Egret | — 6, 30/9, Ludlow Swamp (Capel): breeding. |
| Little Egret | — 2, mid-summer, Wellstead Estuary (Bremer Bay) closing bar: with breeding plumes. |
| Rufous Night Heron | — 31/12, Hilliup Sw (Jerramungup): 5 active nests. |
| Glossy Ibis | — 6, 30/12, Thomsons L (metro). |
| Yellow-billed Spoonbill | — 1, June 85, Alfred Cove. |
| | — 42, Jan 86, Bengier Sw. |
| Cape Barren Goose | — 1, Aug-Sep 85, near Bremer Bay. |
| Freckled Duck | — 2+, 16/10, Bengier Sw. |
| | — 4, 16/11, Beetalyinna Pool on the Greenough R (Greenough). |
| | — 12, 31/12, Hilliup Lake (Jerramungup). |
| | — 82, Dec 85, Chittering L (Chittering). |
| | — 1, 31/1, Herdsman L (metro). |
| Pacific Black Duck | — 4500, 30/12, Thomsons L. |
| Blue-billed Duck | — 62, 15/12, Bambun L (Gingin): some ducklings seen. |
| Square-tailed Kite | — late October, near Hyden. |
| | — 1, 5/1, Roleystone. |
| | — 1, 24/1, Manjimup. |

- Baillon's Crake — 1, 31/12, Ocumup Swamp (Jerramungup).
 — 1, 30/1, Grasmere L (Albany).
 Australian Crake — 1, 30/9, dead on front door-mat of a house in Lake Grace township.
 Black-tailed Native-hen — still receiving reports of small flocks at southern sites, e.g. Tenterden, Bremer Bay.
 — groups of up to 100+ around L Grace town in spring 85; three reports of adults seen with chicks. Some birds fed with poultry.
 Grey Plover — 2, Nov 85, Mears L (Corrigin).
 — 1, Nov 85, L Muir (Manjimup). Both are inland sites.
 Lesser Golden Plover — 3, December, Channel Is., Peel Inlet.
 — 74, 25/1, Channel Is. area, Peel Inlet.
 Red-kneed Dotterel — 76, 24/8, 4 km S Wannamal.
 — 7, 30/1, Grasmere L.
 Hooded Plover — 72, 13/1, Kubitch L (Esperance).
 Eastern Curlew — 4, spring-summer 1985, Preston R mouth (Bunbury).
 — 13, December, Channel Is., Peel Inlet.
 Little Curlew — 1, 9/2, Preston R mouth.
 Wood Sandpiper — 5, 24/12, Toocalup Swamp (Jerramungup).
 Greenshank — 52, 10/1, Forrestdale L.
 — 60, 2/2, Thomsons L.
 Marsh Sandpiper — 24, 2/2, Thomsons L.
 Terek Sandpiper — 1, Oct 85-Jan 86, Alfred Cove.
 Black-tailed Godwit — 5, June 85, Coramup Creek, near Esperance.
 — 1, Oct 85, Ibis L (Narrogin).
 Great Knot — 100, Oct 85, Warden L (Esperance).
 Long-toed Stint — 55, 1/2, McLarty L (Murray).
 — 21, 1/1, Forrestdale L.
 Ruff — 1, 19/12-10/1, Forrestdale L.
 White-fronted type tern — 1, 22/12, Wellstead Estuary closing bar.
 Budgerigar — 15, Nov-Dec 85, in the Lake Grace North area.
 Rainbow Bee-eater — 1, 20/12, Rottnest.
 White-breasted Robin — 2, mid-summer, Bremer Bay: not shown here in The Atlas.
 Variegated Fairy-wren — coloured male with females, 15/2, in Casuarina woodland and tidal rushland near old Belmont tip, Swan River. Possibly a new locality?
 Red-eared Firetail — 3, 28/12, at the point where the CALM walk trail from the Leslie picnic site crosses the stream, 1 km S of Brookton Highway.

2. The North.

- Little Egret — 250, 9/2, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
 Intermediate Egret — 10, 9/2, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
 Black Bittern — 1, 5/2, Beagle Bay (N of Broome).
 Glossy Ibis — 250, 9/2, Lake Eda (E of Broome).
 Freckled Duck — 12+, Nov 85, Gregory Salt Lake.
 Red-necked Phalarope — 24, c. 18/1/86, Leslie Saltfields, E of Port Hedland.
 Common Tern — 15, 23/1, Broome Sewage Ponds: during a 'yellow alert' cyclone watch.
 Arctic Warbler — Early in the New Year, an Arctic Warbler flew into the North Rankin rig, off the Pilbara coast. It later died and was sent to Perth for confirmation of I.D. This is the second Australian record.

CORRECTION:

On page 8, under 'Observations', in the June 85 issue (No. 34) of this newsletter, a record of Chestnut Quail-thrush was listed. This record should have referred to the Cinnamon Quail-thrush. Our apologies!

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Readers should note that views expressed in *W.A. Bird Notes* are not necessarily those of the Committee of the W.A. Group or Council of the R.A.O.U.

RED-BACKED KINGFISHER BREEDING RECORD FOR COAST

A Red-backed Kingfisher in the vicinity of a burrow was first seen on an RAOU excursion on 16 November, 1985 at the sand-pits on K.W. Road, 9 kilometres south of Lancelin.

On 24 December 1985 a Red-backed Kingfisher was observed taking dragonfly and cricket to the burrow which was in a vertical sandwall. Pellets were found on the sand beneath the entrance and a "churring" sound heard from within.

Three observers saw two Kingfishers carrying food near the burrow on 1 January 1986 and a gaping bill was observed at the mouth of the burrow. On 19 January 1986 four Red-backed Kingfishers were seen near the burrow, one of which looked fluffy and immature and two birds were seen in the same area on 2 February 1986.

It seems likely that two birds were reared successfully.

The *Atlas of Australian Birds* does not record Red-backed Kingfisher sightings or breeding in the 1 degree Block concerned. The nearest breeding records are inland of Kalbarri and in the Cunderdin area.

COCKATIEL IN KALAMUNDA

My wife Val and I saw a male Cockatiel *Nymphicus hollandicus* on the Darling Scarp south of Welshpool Road and north of the Bickley Reservoir on 5 February 1986. The bird was initially seen against the sun and only its crest hinted at its identity, but it later flew to a position where we were able to study it at close range. We adjudged it to be a male on the basis of its strong facial markings, not having a good view of the tail which we did not look at in detail. Having had a good opportunity to watch the bird's silhouette and its flight and hear its call, we are sure we saw a bird of the same species (possibly the same bird) on 2 January 1986, when the bird was against the sun and some distance from us. Both sightings took place in the evening and in the same area of the Scarp. On both occasions the bird flew vigorously and appeared to be a wild bird. John Dell of the W.A. Museum has said that Cockatiels have been seen as far south as Boyanup this summer.

J. Talbot

KOOKABURRA MARGINALIA

We have a Kookaburra which lives in the trees in the wooded part of our garden. He loves bonfires and delights in having a dip into the swimming pool. In so far as we can discover, he is not a tame bird and we certainly don't feed him, but he seems quite unafraid of us and is, if anything, slightly scornful of us. With the first billow of smoke from my bonfire, he is there on a branch above my head, sometimes chortling away at my antics as I leap around trying to dodge the smoke. Then very suddenly, he will land at my feet, give me a studied disdainful look, pick up some unfortunate insect or lizard and depart again. He will continue this routine for the whole time I am tending my fire and, if by chance I leave to go off to another part of the garden before my fire is burnt out, then I am dive-bombed in no uncertain fashion by an irate bird. He whizzes past my head and appears to enjoy making me duck and very definitely makes it clear that he wishes me not to leave as he has not finished his dinner. Often, when no bonfire is available to amuse him, he will come and sit on the wooden railing of the edge of the verandah beside

the swimming pool. He clacks his beak against the wood as if he were sharpening it and then he fluffs his feathers and dives into the pool. One wonders how he manages not to drown himself as he goes right under the water and it takes a tremendous heave of his wings to get him again to the surface and thence out to his perch on the railings. He very thoroughly does his toilette in between half a dozen dips, continually sharpening his beak and shuffling himself more comfortably inside his feathers.

Contributed

BROODY GODWIT?

Mr Norm Thomas rang the R.A.O.U. Office recently to relate an encounter with a Bar-tailed Godwit. While walking near the small boat harbour at Carnarvon on 13 January 1986, Norm saw a Bar-tailed Godwit putting on a 'broken-wing' distraction display. The godwit 'buzzed' him twice while he searched samphire and seaweed unsuccessfully for signs of a nest. This species normally breeds in the Northern Hemisphere.

NOTICES

Ron and Catherine Van Delft are keen to hear from someone willing to do pictures of birds in a style suitable for screen printing. The style is required to be bold black on white as it is not possible to incorporate grey areas on a screen. An example of the type of work required is on display at the RAOU office. Phone 364 6202 during office hours or leave a message on the answering machine.

PROJECT PELICAN

The Bird Observers Club and Gould League of Victoria again request our help in Project Pelican. The aim is to try to find out whether Pelican numbers are declining, where Pelicans are to be found at various times of the year and information on breeding and feeding.

The month of April 1986 is the last in the current survey and if you wish to participate via a simple recording sheet, copies can be obtained from the RAOU office.

Pelicans are not difficult to see and identify and all members are encouraged to take part in this final survey and note and record all Pelican sightings during April. Not only will the information be of value but it will be a further important contribution in co-operation.

BIRDING IN THE OUTBACK

The W.A. Group office has a copy of Keith Richards' "Birding in the Outback". This is a pamphlet produced by the Bird Observers Club and which gives good simple information on the basic challenges of outback birding.

CAPITAL BIRDING

A number of copies of "Capital Birding" by Reg Johnson are available at the RAOU office. This pamphlet, from the Bird Observers Club, lists the major bird organisations in each Australian capital city, with their address, times of meeting, outings and good bird areas in and around the capitals. Excellent for the inter-state traveller.

DARLING RANGE INFORMATION

The W.A. Naturalists Club has been conducting a natural history survey in the Kalamunda/Gosnells area of the Darling Scarp and the time has come to write up the survey. I would like to appeal for information on the vegetation of the Scarp (between Muchea and Boyanup) in the past, as the present vegetation has been severely disturbed by human activity (clearing, increased incidence of fire, etc.). Historical information on the Scarp's birdlife, reptiles and mammals would also be welcome, as would photographs (which would be returned) of the Scarp in former days.

Jeremy Talbot - 291 6563

EXHIBITION

Mrs Joan Jordan has agreed to produce eight paintings of W.A. birds for use by the RAOU as illustrations on Christmas/gift cards. Mrs Jordan has generously agreed to allow her work to be used by the RAOU free of charge. It is hoped to get the cards printed at small or no charge and for them to be placed on sale at a number of outlets, with proceeds to the RAOU.

It is planned to mount an exhibition of W.A. birds by various artists at the Perth Concert Hall at which time the cards will be launched.

Information leaflets for this exhibition are being prepared.

Contact: Mrs Brian Wilson - phone 293 1094

HERITAGE TRAILS FOR BIRDS

The Bicentennial Heritage Trail Secretariat will have application forms available in April for persons or groups who wish to apply for funds to set up Heritage Trails. Funds will cover the costs of materials and in some cases, possibly labour.

Any RAOU member who is familiar with a site which supports a good range of birds which would be enhanced and or protected by the establishment of a proper trail should contact any member of the RAOU WA Committee or the RAOU WA Group Conservation Convener Brian Wilson on 293 1094.

The Heritage Trails Secretariat has published a booklet "Guidelines for the Development of Heritage Trails" which can be obtained from them by telephoning Simon Swings on 322 4375.

PUBLICATIONS

YOU CAN BUY THE FOLLOWING ITEMS at the RAOU Office, Suite 30, first floor, 15 Ogilvie Rd, Canning Bridge 6153, W.A. Don't forget to add the cost of postage and packing if you are not calling to pick up purchases. Items are usually available for purchase at RAOU meetings and excursions.

This arrangement provides a service for members and much needed funds for the Group.

- * The Atlas of Australian Birds \$49
(produced by the RAOU : shows distribution of bird species)
- * overlays for the Atlas \$6
- * Methods for Censusing Birds in Australia - 1982 \$5
(produced by the W.A. Group, RAOU)
- * Report of the Middlesex Study Centre \$5
- * A Pocket List of Australian Birds 70 c
(a handy checklist ; produced by Canberra Ornithologists Group)
- * A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia, by G. Pizzey \$17
(1985 reprint, paperback ; small format)
- * The Birds of Australia, by Simpson and Day \$30
(1984, large format ; text and plate facing each other)
- * Every Australian Bird Illustrated \$22
(large format ; 563 colour photos)
- * In Quest of Bower Birds, by N. Chaffer \$26
(large format ; text and photographs of all species)
- * A Field Guide to the Birds of W.A., by Storr and Johnstone \$14
(W.A. Museum 1985 edition ; solely birds of W.A.)
- * New Zealand Birds \$17
(1983 edition ; large format ; text and photographs by several authors)
- * Eyre Bird Observatory : Report 1981-83 \$5
- * RAOU Calendar 1986 \$8
- * Bird- call tapes \$10
(3 choices ; mostly W.A. birds ; announced version)
- * RAOU Emu badges \$3
- * RAOU ties (navy blue or maroon) \$10
- * Western Australian Bird Notes \$1.50
- * Bird Life Of Rottneest \$8.00

If you have suggestions for titles that we could obtain, please give details to the W.A. Office. Please bear in mind that the W.A.

Group is reluctant to spend money on bird books that do not sell readily.

Also, few local publishers or distributors are prepared to offer a discount on bird books. Consequently our choices are rather limited.

COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

March 8	Day excursion : Boyagin Rock
March 8-16	THE GREAT DUCK COUNT
March 16	metro walk : Bold Park
March 24	Meeting : Brian Collins - sunbirds

April 4-7	Banding Workshop : Perup
April 13	metro walk : Claughton Reserve
April 28	Meeting - (informal) sound recording

May 3	metro walk : Blue Gum Lake
May 3-11	TRIP to Eyre Bird Observatory
May 10	Day excursion : Thomsons Lake
May 26	Meeting - (informal) seabirds

June 15	seabird watch : Fremantle
June 15	metro walk : Point Walter
June 16	Meeting - Roger Jaensch - waterbirds
June 22-28	CAMPOUT - Kathleen Valley

July 12 or 13	Day excursion : Boyagin?
July 28	Meeting - (informal) metro birds

August 9 or 10	Day excursion
August 25	Meeting - (informal) waders

September 14 or 15	Day excursion
September 22	Meeting - The Zoo Director
September 27-29	CAMPOUT : Tutanning

October 11 or 12	Day excursion : Boyagin?
October 20 (?)	Start of Bird Week (?)
October 27	Meeting -

November 8 or 9	Day excursion
November 24	Meeting - (informal) bush-birds

December 6	Three Park Search and Social Evening
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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: e.g. 'a flock of unidentified cormorants', or 'a flock of Great Cormorants'.
- * a suggested method for recording dates and localities is, e.g. '11 May 1984, seven km SW of Moora' (i.e. 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 W.A. Office,

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

for June 86 issue - third Friday in April (18th).

BIRD OF PREY WATCH

Bird of Prey Watch (hereinafter shortened to BOP Watch) is an exciting new RAOU/ARA (Australasian Raptor Association) scheme designed to harness the skills and energies of Australian bird enthusiasts for the benefit of raptors. BOP Watch uses a simple counting technique that will hone your raptor identification skills and profitably occupy your journeys along the nation's roads.

Why count raptors you might well ask? Because of their position at the top of food chains, raptors are vulnerable and so are often the first birds to register declines in population numbers. They should receive special attention because they act as early biological indicators of the health of their environment. All too often declines are not recorded until well after the event and then it may be too late for us to do much about it. For example, a marked decline in the numbers of Whistling Kites throughout southern Australia in the past 15 years has gone almost

unrecorded. It is now difficult to identify whether the Whistling Kites declined because of decreases in rabbit numbers, misuse of pesticides such as "lucifer" or other causes.

The aims of BOP Watch are to identify:

- 1) biogeographic units or "zones" in Australia which are of prime importance to different species of raptor;
- 2) zones in which the numbers of different species of raptor undergo seasonal or irregular increases when nearby/distant ones show declines;
- 3) zones in which some species of raptor are considerably more or less abundant than in others;
- 4) zones in which the baseline BOP Watch data on the relative abundance of raptors indicate that unnatural and unprecedented declines have subsequently occurred.

The contribution that such data could make to the conservation and management of Australian raptors is considerable.

The rules and methods.

BOP Watch data are to be collected by bird enthusiasts as they travel the nation's roads at normal highway speeds. The zone a driver is in is located by referring to a map printed on the back of an information sheet. Drivers fill in the number of kilometres travelled, the number of observers and score boxes for weather variables, etc. on a printed score sheet which lists the names of all Australian raptors in the left-hand column. Then they simply score all raptors as they see them (unaided vision only) and get a tally for each zone travelled through. Stops should be made to positively identify with binoculars an individual raptor with which one is having difficulty but no additional birds may be counted and recorded whilst stopped. A new score sheet should be used for each new zone travelled through. A new score sheet should also be started for after dark BOP Watching for

owls. Drivers must travel for at least 50km through a zone before filling in a score sheet. In other words, no BOP Watching on trips to the corner shop and, if you merely cut across the corner of a zone on a long trip, do not count there and do not fill in a score sheet for that zone. Limitations, feasibility and projections.

Most of the limitations of counting raptors in this way have been set out by Fuller, M.R. & Mosher, J.A., 1981, "Methods of detecting and counting raptors: a review", *Studies in Avian Biology* 6:235-246. I have field tested the BOP Watch scheme over the past 18 months and have found it to be easy and practical. In single trips of about 500 km I have turned complete amateur co-drivers into competent identifiers of distant raptors. I have found that zones need to be of such size that fewer than six will be traversed in a day's driving. Otherwise repeated checking of maps could be frustrating.

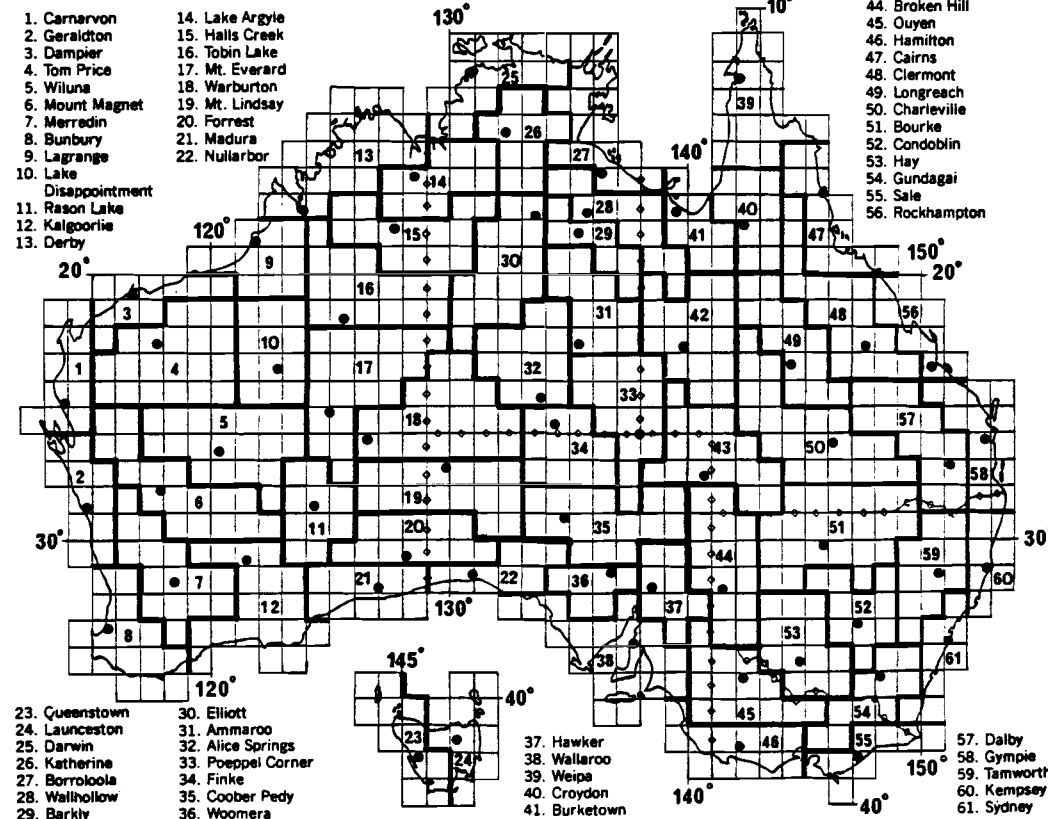
The common, conspicuous Australian raptor species of the open country (that's most of them) will receive much better coverage from BOP Watchers than will the rarer species. However, it is every bit as important to know where the common species are, where they are moving to and from, and how stable their populations are. The Brown Falcon and Australian Kestrel are the first and second most widely distributed of all the birds in Australia after all.

The use of such data for management and conservation purposes has been mentioned. It may also be possible to extrapolate the findings to provide an understanding of the movements of rarer species which use the same or similar prey resources. Indeed, it may be possible to gain insight into the population trends of important agricultural pests such as rabbits and house mice from BOP Watch data. This may be of value to the agricultural community and soil conservators.

Many contributors will find the simplicity of BOP Watch very attractive. The large numbers of outback travellers who already count raptors and send their lists in to be published in ARA News or in one of the state or national journals is testimony to the ease and popularity of the past-time. What raptor counting needs is methodology and organisation. With your help, I hope to provide that. People interested in participating in BOP Watch should write for information and score sheets to: Dr. D.J. Baker-Gabb, RAOU, 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3039.

David Baker-Gabb.

Zone number and check town



If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact -

ALLAN BURBIDGE - P.O. Box 312, Wanneroo 6065.
Phone : 09 306 1642

BIRD OF PREY WATCH (BOP WATCH) INSTRUCTIONS

1. The zone that you are driving through is located by referring to the map overleaf. Each zone has a number, and the location of each zone's check town is marked by a large black dot. There is a list of zone numbers and their check towns on the left hand side of the map.
2. A new BOP Watch score sheet should be used for each zone travelled through.
3. A new score sheet should also be commenced half an hour after observed sunset for after dark BOP Watching for owls.
4. Drivers must travel for at least 50 km through a zone before filling in a score sheet. In other words, no BOP Watching on trips to the corner shop and, if you merely cut across the corner of a zone on a long trip, do not count there and do not fill in a score sheet for that zone.
5. Do send in your score sheets even if you don't see a single raptor in a particular zone. It is just as important to know where birds of prey are not seen.
6. When filling in start and finish times use the 2400 hour clock. Thus, for 11 o'clock in the morning write 1100, and for twenty past four in the afternoon write 1620 (1200+400+20). The score for minutes travelled will therefore be the difference between your start and finish times, minus any time spent lunching by the side of the road, refuelling, changing a flat tyre and so forth.
7. When filling in distances, round them off to the nearest whole kilometer or mile.

An example of a filled in score sheet

BIRD OF PREY WATCH

Observer's name DAVID BAKER-GABB

Address 21 GLADSTONE ST., MOONEE

PONDS Postcode 3037 Phone 03-3701272

Brief description of route travelled in zone ALONG SILVER CITY

HIGHWAY FROM WENTWORTH VIA BROKEN HILL

AND PACKSADDLE TO TIBBOOBURRA.

Zone Number 4 Check Town BROKEN HILL Observer's Code 12

Number Observers 2 Day 12 Month 09 Year 85

Start Time 0630 Finish Time 1705 Minutes travelled 655

Start Odometer 2641 Finish Odometer 3216 Total Distance 575

Office use only

Time

1 Day 2 Night

1 Standard time 2 Summer time

Odometer reading

1 Kilometers 2 Miles

Weather

1 Cold <15° 2 Mid 15-30° 3 Hot >30°

1 Fine 2 Showers 3 Rain

1 Calm 2 Light breeze 3 Strong wind

1 <50% cloud 2 >50% cloud

Enter Code Number

1

1

1

2

2

2

2

2

Species	Total	Cumulative Scores
Spotted Harrier	218	
Swamp Harrier	219	
Grey Goshawk	220	
Brown Goshawk	221	1
Brown Goshawk/Collared Sparrowhawk	220	
Collared Sparrowhawk	222	
Red Goshawk*	223	
Wedge-tailed Eagle	224	6
Little Eagle	225	1
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	226	
Brahmany Kite	227	
Whistling Kite	228	8
Black Kite	229	63
Square-tailed Kite*	230	
Black-breasted Buzzard*	231	
Black-shouldered Kite	232	2
Letter-winged Kite*	233	
Pacific Baza	234	
Australian Hobby	235	
Grey Falcon*	236	
Peregrine Falcon	237	
Black Falcon	238	2
Brown Falcon	239	7
Australian Kestrel	240	28
Osprey	241	
Underfledged diurnal raptor	300	
Southern Boobook	242	
Barking Owl	246	
Rufous Owl*	247	
Powerful Owl	248	
Barn Owl	249	
Mashed Owl	250	
Eastern Grass Owl*	252	
Sooty Owl*	253	
Total species	10	
Total birds	121	

8. The code numbers for weather and other variables refer to the numbers alongside each variable. Thus, for a mild temperature of 15 - 30°C, enter 2, for a strong wind enter 3, for an odometer reading in miles enter 2, and so on. All of these should be very obvious, except perhaps for rain. Enter a 3 for rain, rather than a 2 for showers, if you spend more than three-quarters of a trip through a zone with your windscreen wipers on and the precipitation is periodically heavy.

9. When BOP Watching, travel at normal legal highway speeds. Score all raptors as you see them (unaided vision only) and get a tally for each zone travelled through. Stops should be made to positively identify with binoculars an individual raptor with which you are having difficulty, but no additional birds may be counted and recorded whilst stopped.

10. If you see one of the eight rarer species of raptor (marked with an asterix on the score sheet), then fill in a detailed description of the bird on the back of the sheet which will convince the Co-ordinator of what you saw. Expect an URRF if a description is lacking or inadequate.

11. Record on the back of the score sheet interesting behavioural observations of any species.

Details to record on the back of this sheet:

1. Also references and descriptions (URRF) of the eight rarer* species.
2. Interesting behavioural observations of any species.

Send completed sheets to:
David Baker-Gabb, RAOU, 21 Gladstone St.
Moonee Ponds, Vic. 3038.