



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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## SPECTACLE AT LE LIEVRE SWAMP

On the weekend of May 10-11, Dot Kingston, Gail Hooper and I set out on another attempt to find Le Lievre Swamp (between Derby and Fitzroy Crossing), which although marked on maps and in the road atlas was unknown to the locals, even those who actually resided on Liveringa Station where it was supposedly situated. A previous trip had been unsuccessful, although we had found Moulamen Swamp and in the process three Yellow Chats which made the weekend worthwhile.

Armed with the best map we could procure (printed in 1974) we set out from Blina Swamp via Erskine Bore, only to discover that the tracks marked on our map no longer existed, and new fences were erected across the places we felt we wanted to go. Nevertheless we set off at various tangents, often across country, to try and find a way towards our goal.

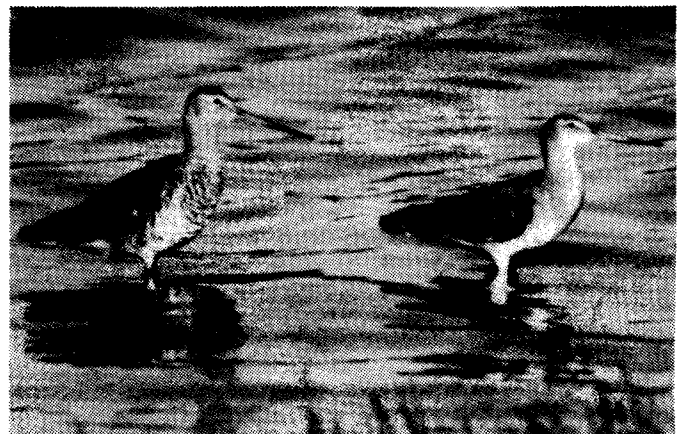
After bouncing over rutted ground, through head high grass for a long time we finally located the swamp and the whole project became infinitely worthwhile. The swamp and lake area is very large, roughly 22 kilometres in circumference, and it teemed with birds. We estimated that we saw about 40,000 birds on our trek round the area, most of them waterbirds. For example: about 20,000 Plumed Whistling Ducks, huge rafts of birds that stretched for hundreds of metres; 5,000 Wandering Whistling Duck, 1,500 Grey Teal, but only 500 and 200 Hardheads and Pacific Black Duck respectively. All these were on the lake. On the swamp areas about 5,000 Magpie Geese, 2,000 Glossy Ibis and a thousand Australian Pelicans. To then begin to speak of 500 Straw-necked Ibis, 250 Pacific Herons, 300 each of Great and Intermediate Egrets and 250 Black-tailed Native Hens seems trivial, although about 500 Willie Wagtails and the same number of Magpie Larks is something we seldom see.

There were many others: 160 Royal Spoonbills for example, and 350 Brolgas, but the exciting highlights for us were two Black Falcons, 1 White-bellied Sea Eagle 95kms from the sea, and to our disbelief 15 Great Crested Grebes in an area where we understood they did not exist. Strangely we did not see either of the other two Grebes, although they are not uncommon in the Kimberley -oh yes, and another Yellow Chat. Going back to Erskine Bore across country we were enchanted to flush Golden-headed Cisticolas in the waving seas of grass and also 2 Button-quail, probably Little, but we aren't certain about that.

As southerners who choose to live in the Kimberley we were enchanted to spend several hours in the midst of such beauty - we wish that others (without guns) could share with us sights and sounds like these.

As a postscript could we suggest that this seems an ideal place to add to the Wildlife Heritage list or its equivalent.

Brice Wells.



Black-tailed Godwit at Point Waylen. Also in hundreds near Wyndham, May 1986.

Photograph by Peel Howden.

## HOW THEY WADDLED

### Results of the 1986 Great Duck Count

More than 100 volunteer observers recently participated in a census of waterfowl in south-western Australia. The census, known as *The Great Duck Count*, was organised by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union with funding from the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Ducks, swans and coots were counted at 850 wetlands from Kalbarri to Esperance, in the first of a series of annual surveys to determine long-term changes in the abundance of each species. This initiative has yet to be emulated by other States.

The Great Duck Count was conducted from 8-16 March and preliminary analysis of results has revealed totals of 84,000 ducks and 18,000 swans. These figures have doubled the highest figures recorded in R.A.O.U. surveys of 200 nature reserves in south-western Australia since 1981. A sample of all major wetland types was investigated in the Great Duck Count; this included 19 estuaries not in reserves and 490 farm dams. A small number of remote sites (e.g. Kimberley) was surveyed to give an indication of conditions elsewhere in the State.

Australian Shelducks, Pacific Black Ducks and Grey Teal comprised more than 80% of the ducks counted in south-western Australia. Counts of the Black Swan, Musk Duck and Maned Duck were several times higher than previous counts, but Hardheads were largely absent from the region. As shown by earlier R.A.O.U. studies, populations of the Freckled Duck and Chestnut Teal were particularly low (a few hundred each), highlighting the need for urgent studies of requirements for conservation of these two species.

The Black Swan was the dominant species on estuaries and inlets, while Maned Ducks were dominant on farm dams. Counts from the Swan River provided many of the 16,000 Eurasian Coots tallied.

Dumbleyung Lake and Peel Inlet both held in excess of 5000 swans and ducks, while 20 other wetlands each carried at least 1000 swans and ducks. Many of these sites were in the Coblaline River system, in the Shires of Woodanilling and Wagin. Some wetlands such as Mortijinup Lake near Esperance were not previously known to be important for waterfowl. Of the 57 metropolitan wetlands surveyed, Bibra and Yangebup Lakes held the greatest numbers of swans and ducks.

A comprehensive report will be published later in the year. The organisers wish to thank all who participated, as their efforts have given this important study a successful start. Undoubtedly the birds are thankful too!

## COMING MEETINGS

Monday 16 June Roger Jaensch : important discoveries from water bird studies in W.A. since 1981.

28 July Ron Van Delft : metro birds

25 August Dr Harry Recher : either on honeyeater ecology in Eastern Australia or on heron ecology in North America (Dr Recher is with the Australian Museum, Sydney)

22 September John deJose : Director of the Zoological Gardens Perth : The New Zoo, new Initiatives

## COMING EXCURSIONS

### **Saturday 12 July - North Gingin**

We intend to visit an area of vacant Crown land just north of Gingin. Some 8000 hectares, it was proposed as a nature reserve (Boonanarring) under the System Six recommendations. Mainly jarrah woodland with patches of banksia, little is known of the birdlife to be found there. Come and help improve knowledge of the area. Easy to moderate walks expected. Meet at the main picnic park area in Gingin at 0830 a.m. Leader - Allan Burbidge.

### **Saturday 26 July - Star Swamp**

World Environment Day Walk No. 1

As well as the swamp there is surrounding bushland with tuart, banksias, blackboys and heath. Meet at the swamp in Hope Street North Beach/Waterman near Lawley Street at 2 p.m. The leader will be metro-birder Mrs Vera Patterson who knows the area well.

### **Saturday 9 August - Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve**

Located near Brookton this reserve contains impressive stands of powderbark wandoo. Black Honeyeater (exceptional), Tawny Frogmouth, Painted Button-quail and Elegant Parrots were amongst those sighted on the trip in March. Moderate to easy walks with some more strenuous around the rock. Meet just past the intersection of Brookton Hwy and Canning Road, Karragullen at 0730 (same place as in March). Round trip of about 250 km.

### **15-18 August; Lewana Cottage Campout**

Two cottages have been reserved at the Lewana settlement 17km from Balingup on the Blackwood River. (One cottage suits persons of restricted mobility). Join us for low-key bush birding and some free time in a pleasant setting for 3 nights. Cost is \$15 accommodation. Bring your own food. No tents or vans.

To reserve a place ring Diane 381 9035 (5-8pm weekdays) and pay \$15 by 30 July to D. Beckingham, 101 Park St., Subiaco 6008. Organiser - D. Beckingham.

### **Sunday 31 August - Carine Swamp (Metro walk)**

World Environment Day Walk No. 2

Meet at 2 p.m. in the carpark off Beach Road (between Duffy Road and Okely Road Carine) at the reserve. Leader - Geoff Shannon.

### **Saturday 13 September - Neerabup/Jandabup**

Neerabup National Park and Lake Jandabup are near Wanneroo. Neerabup has some prime tuart forest. We visited this area in February 1986 and it will be interesting to compare sightings from each outing. Meet at the corner of Church Street and Scenic Drive, Wanneroo at 0830 a.m.

### **CAMPOUT : Saturday 27 - Monday 29 September - Tutanning Nature Reserve**

Located some 20 km East of Pingelly this Reserve of 2089 hectares is on the old Dutarning Range. The vegetation is a mixture of wandoo, open woodland and casuarina thickets with breakaways and granite outcrops. Numbats are said to occur there. As a result of our last visit in June 1985, 14 species were added to the Reserve bird list which now totals 85. We have permission to camp on farming land near the CALM quarters. Toilet facilities will be available. An officer from CALM will accompany our party. Pingelly is 154 km from Perth - allow enough driving time for a rendezvous at Pingelly Post Office at 0915 a.m.

## MEETING REPORTS

### **INFORMAL MEETING - 24 FEBRUARY**

A goodly number of members attended the Herdsman Wildlife Centre on a warm evening where they were entertained by a series of slides taken by Murray Unkovich. Murray has travelled frequently in the north of the State and his commentary was informative. Although 'professional' status as a photographer was disclaimed, the slides were good and of real interest. Those who have ventured into the hard world of bird photography will fully appreciate the skills displayed.

### **GUEST SPEAKER - 24 MARCH**

Brian Collins spoke about some aspects of the research he has carried out with Sunbirds and Sugarbirds in the Cape Town area in South Africa. These birds are abundant in many parts of southern Africa, especially those regions where proteas, ericas and leucospermums flower profusely. Sugarbirds typically weigh 35-45 gm and are conspicuous by virtue of their aerobatic displays and tendency to perch on top of the vegetation that they visit. Sunbirds are generally much smaller, ranging from collared and orange-breasted sunbirds that weigh 7-10 gm to malachite sunbirds that weigh approximately 15 gm. These birds are also conspicuous, mainly because of their brightly-coloured plumage and quick, darting movements. Sugarbirds and sunbirds make some use of insects, but generally rely on nectar as their main source of food. When visiting flowers to obtain nectar, they acquire substantial loads of pollen that are subsequently brushed onto the stigmas of other flowers. In many cases, the timing of visits by birds is closely synchronized with development of the flowers. For instance, visits are most frequent to flowers when nectar availability is greatest and either pollen is available on anthers or pollen presenters, or stigmas are receptive to pollen that is deposited on them. Flowers that produce little nectar are rarely visited by sunbirds or sugarbirds.

### **INFORMAL MEETING 26 MAY**

John Hansen gave an interesting account of the complexities of sound recording of birds. Like bird photographs which appear at first consideration to be a matter of simplicity, so sound recording turns out not to be just a matter of setting up a microphone and recording device. The microphone, unlike human ears, is not able to filter out unwanted sound, with the result that if there are not extraneous noises (wind, vehicles, etc.) a whole aviary appears to go off at once. John capably pointed out some tricks of the trade to overcome these difficulties, though recording in the night seemed to pose a few problems of identification. John also showed some excellent slides of the sequence of the Twelve-Wire Bird-of-Paradise courting display and calls to match. A most enjoyable evening.

## EXCURSION REPORTS

### LAKE GWELUP - 23 FEBRUARY

Some sixty people attended on a pleasant Sunday afternoon. Bird numbers were less than earlier in the year because of repeated disturbances by boats and because of recent rain. Consequently the total numbers of ducks were reduced and only Black Duck and domestic species were present. A Black-shouldered Kite hovered and swooped and an Australian Hobby dashed past. The highlight of the day was a party of Rainbow Bee-eaters hawking through the trees which also contained White-winged Trillers and Varied Sittella. Old nests of Rainbow Bee-eater, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Singing Honeyeater and Black-shouldered Kite were pointed out. We were pleased to have the company of a number of 'local people' and thanks to those members who made them welcome. Geoff Shannon

### BOYAGIN ROCK - 8 MARCH

A pleasant walk around the Rock in the morning, followed by an excursion into heath and wandoo woodland in the afternoon resulted in a list of 55 species for the day. A lack of flowers in the heath meant that honeyeaters were few in number, but a total of twelve species were seen. Two Tawny Frogmouths between the carpark and the Rock attracted the attention of the photographers. Common Bronzewing nesting and Dusky Woodswallows feeding dependent young were found. Almost everyone got excellent views of an obliging Painted Button-quail but the highlight of the trip, however, was a pair of Black Honeyeaters. These were first sighted by Simon Nevill in wandoo woodland in the south-eastern section of the Reserve. They were very quiet and for much of the time were fairly low down so that everyone got a good view. Black Honeyeaters are birds of the inland, not often observed in the more coastal areas. Those people who stayed overnight to see the comet were disappointed because of the dense cloud cover, but it was otherwise a very successful trip. An enjoyable day's birding which resulted in a useful contribution to our knowledge of the birds of this important Nature Reserve.

### BOLD PARK - 16 MARCH

At this twilight meeting, led by Ron Van Delft, the bird people became mixed up with the flower people. It had nothing to do with the birds and the bees, it so happened that the meeting coincided with the only Sunday in Garden Week. The venue for the excursion was advertised as being Bold Park, but it was conducted around what in wetter times are called Perry Lakes, which were only a series of ponds and puddles - Perry Ponds? Scurrilous rumour had it that the water shortage was caused by the flower people watering their plants - even if true, they would have had difficulty. Water was scarce, so much so that two Galahs which walked down to the water's edge to drink were chased away by a Pacific Black Duck - in order to conserve what was left of the precious fluid. About 20 species were recorded. The number of spectators varied at each stopping place as people joined and left the group as they felt like it. After a B.B.Q. tea, ten intrepid birdos faced the dangers of the night to seek nocturnal birds but only managed to raise a single Red Wattlebird from its slumber. J. Donahoe

### CLAUGHTON RESERVE - 12 APRIL

A small group of nine gathered at Cloughton Reserve on a still windless morning. Thirty species were observed including Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Mistletoe Bird and both Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel. A Darter was seen to descend almost vertically some 12 metres into the Swan River and emerge with a fish in its bill. Alan Robertson

### THOMSONS LAKE - 10 MAY

About 30 people attended the RAOU excursion at Thompsons Lake on May 10th. Small groups of observers made their way across part of the dry lake bed where 7 Purple Swampheens, an Australian Kestrel and a Black-shouldered Kite were sighted. The return trip was through open bushland where 19 different species of birds were seen, including Scarlet Robin, Rufous Whistler, Red-capped Parrot and a Little Wattlebird. The total number of species observed was 23.

## COMMITTEE NOTES

The Committee met in February and March. Among matters that came under consideration have been :-

**Conservation Sub-Committee** - This group is attempting to produce a list of important WA birding localities.

**Bird Week (October 1986)** - Activities for the Bird Week are under discussion and planning.

**Finance** - Ever necessary topic for thought and management.

**Future Projects** - Discussion of ideas for future WA Group bird projects.

**Associated Groups** - Desire to achieve closer liaison with the various groups associated with birding e.g. Raptor Association, Seabird Group etc.

As well as matters concerned with the week-to-week running of the WA Group.

## PERUP BANDING WORKSHOP

### 4-7 April

The Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme held a Workshop at Perup Forest Study Centre over an extended weekend from 4-7 April, 1986.

Forty eight people attended, with twenty-three banders taking part in the Workshop - the first of its kind in W.A.

The objectives of the Workshop were to :-

1. promote discussion on handling and banding techniques
2. standardise data gathering procedures
3. initiate communication between banders
4. encourage contributions to a guide for ageing and sexing Australian birds in the hand.

Daily activities centred on trapping and banding a variety of bird species with nightly sessions of bat banding

Afternoon and evening seminars were led by Dr Harry Recher, Australian Museum, Sydney; Dr Ron Wooller, Murdoch University, Perth; and Dr Brian Collins, WAIT, Perth. Each described a research programme based on mist netting and banding resident and transient birds. Group discussions followed and took place whenever two or more people found the opportunity to share a common interest. One participant, however, was seen deep in conversation with himself. Pleasant, selective company, no doubt! Brett Lane, Co-ordinator, RAOU Wader Studies, gave an impromptu lecture on moult recording techniques, describing the process of data recording used by Ken Rogers, Regional Organiser in Victoria, when compiling information for ageing and sexing birds in the hand. A guide, called "The Banders Aid" will serve as a national reference for banders in Australia and will establish the procedures to be followed when accumulating data. Knowledge of moult patterns and ageing processes in Australian Birds is not well documented: "The Banders Aid" will serve to remedy this condition.

122 birds of 21 species were processed; 97 new birds and 25 recoveries.

Following is a list of the most frequently encountered species :-

	BANDED	RECOVERED
Splendid Fairy-wren	16	4
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	8	6
Grey Fantail	10	2
White-browed Scrubwren	9	3
Golden Whistler	7	2
Inland Thornbill	7	2

Although the total number of birds handled was not very spectacular, the true value of the experience was in just how much could be learned about each individual. Every aspect of banding technique and species morphology came under discussion, often long after the bird had been released.

Group activities included an exercise in comparative measuring during which 16 people took a series of measurements from

three dead (preserved) birds. The table below shows the recorded measurements made by the two organisers and the mean of the collective measurements.

Black-faced Woodswallow	: Wing length	: 126	: 125	: 124.9
Peregrine Falcon	: Head-Bill	: 73.6	: 73.3	: 71.63
	: Exposed Culmen	: 26.4	: 26.4	: 26.14
	: Middle Claw	: 21.5	: 21.5	: 21.89
Singing Honeyeater	: Bill Length	: 20.6	: 20.4	: 20.67

Variations were very small, even from those who had not had a lot of previous practise at measuring. It is encouraging to know that with regular reinforcement, group contributions of data can be incorporated into a banding research programme.

A register of approved banding projects is being compiled to publicise the activities of W.A. banders. This information will be featured in the "Corella Newsletter". Eight projects were registered at the Workshop.

Special guests for a day were Dick and Molly Brown of Manjimup and Ian and Eleanor Rowley of Guildford. Their brief presence enabled many banders to meet for the first time the curators of banding programmes that may well be the longest running in W.A.; the Brown's at Middlesex and the Rowley's at Gooseberry Hill.

The next Workshop is already in preparation. This will be held somewhere in the Kalgoorlie district and will take place during the weekend of 20-22 September 1986. Anyone interested should contact Wally Klau, Sub-Regional Organiser, Goldfields W.A., P.O. Box 346, Kalgoorlie, W.A. 6430 or Perry de Rebeira, Regional Organiser, 12 Glenwood Avenue, Glen Forrest W.A. 6071.

Perry de Rebeira - (Regional Organiser, Western Australia)  
Grant Wardell-Johnson - (Sub-Regional Organiser, South-Western Australia)

## METRO BIRDER NEWS

"A Guide to Finding Birds in Perth" will be the official title of the forthcoming book.

During the last few months good progress has been made towards writing the book despite unexpected delays which put the timetable out by at least two weeks.

It is proving a difficult task to choose 40 sites from the 118 Metro birder sites that have sufficient surveys. A number of criteria have been used to objectively choose the sites. First, sites which do not have public access, such as golf courses, were crossed out.

Then a table was drawn up with sites across the top, and species down the side. For each species and site the percentage of surveys recording that species was calculated. For example if 3 of 10 surveys recorded Yellow-rumped Thornbill, a 30% value is recorded. For each species the two highest percentages were highlighted where there were not more than two sites recording 100% (as was the case with many common species). As the purpose of this exercise was to find the sites with the highest chance of finding species X in a short survey, only those surveys which included a start and finish time were included in this analysis. After adding the common species this table produced 48 sites, but with an uneven spread of species per site.

Geographical location, land tenure, breeding information and species richness will be used as criteria to reduce the number of sites further to the desired number.

It was quite surprising to find a number of species restricted to one, two or three sites only. A list of these species and their sites will be published in the book.

I will be in contact with Metrobirders who have surveyed sites that are likely to be included in the book, seeking more specific information about the site and the survey routes used.

I would like to thank the office volunteers who helped check and put the data into order. That mammoth task is now complete. Typing is now the only MBP task for which volunteers are required.

Apologies to those people expecting printouts of their survey work. At the moment the printouts are available on request show-

ing total species frequency at each site over the whole year. Priority at the moment is getting the book to the publisher and some data analysis and much of the first draft is still to be done. When this is completed I expect to have some time to complete the task of printing and distributing over 180 individual printouts.

RON VAN DELFT

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

### EYRE COURSE PROGRAMMES

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

EYRE'S FURRY FRIENDS : 22-28 June 1986

Leader: Doug Watkins

Need to broaden your horizons? Come to Eyre for the week and have personal introductions to the mammals of the southern Nullarbor and Roe Plains. Activities will include looking for cave bats and 'drift lining' for Pygmy Possums and hopping mice. Why stay at home?

HISTORY OF EYRE TELEGRAPH STATION : 27 July - 2 August 1986

Leader: Bill Graham

The history of the East-West telegraph line, Eyre, the Eyre Telegraph Station, Observatory and the region with site inspections.

ART WORKSHOP : 21-27 September 1986

Leader: Donna Reid

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

BIRDWATCHING FOR BEGINNERS : 28 September - 4 October 1986

Leaders: Rob and Jan Hill

This course is designed to give beginners a knowledge of how to set about identifying birds. The use of binoculars, note-taking in the field and the proper use of reference guides and books will be covered. Birds nesting in spring will make this an ideal time to visit Eyre.

FIELD ORNITHOLOGY : 7-13 December 1986

Leader: Dr. Stephen Davies

This course, led by the Director of the R.A.O.U., will cover a variety of aspects of field ornithology including banding, census and bird behaviour.

XMAS AT EYRE : 21-27 December 1986

Rush to escape the rush - join the Eyre Escape.

A delightful place to spend Christmas. There will be abundant birdlife, pleasant weather and a magnificent Xmas feast. Enjoy Christmas at Eyre with the help of an enthusiastic group of young naturalists.

NEW YEAR AT EYRE : 28 December - 3 January 1987

Your New Year Resolutions must be:

1. Come to Eyre.
2. Birdwatch.
3. Learn some local history.
4. Visit the local sites.
5. Swim.
6. Beachcomb.
7. Stargaze.
8. Eat good home cooked food.
9. Relax.
10. Enjoy a week at Eyre.

Leaders: Mike and Mandy Bamford

**SPECIAL CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR DISCOUNT: 10% discount for deposits received by the end of September.**

## LIMITED PLACES. BOOK EARLY TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT

DUNE STABILIZATION WORK PARTY 5-24 January 1987  
Cost: 1/2 price

Why not go on a working holiday? Get fit, healthy and tanned. All you need to do is enjoy 1/2 of each day planting seeds, breathing the fresh sea air and appreciating the panorama from Irene's Peak. A bargain difficult to resist. This is a most important project currently relying on several dedicated people who desperately need helpers. Eyre's future may depend on your assistance.

**In 1987 courses will cost \$160 or \$150 for those who pay one month in advance. Cost includes accomodation, food, tuition and transport within the reserve.**

**Format: Courses commence with lunch on Sunday and finish with lunch on Saturday.**

BIRDING BRUSH-UP : 25-31 January

Leader: Steve Keeling

Following the highly informative and entertaining Easter course led by Steve in 1986 we have invited him to return to Eyre. Steve, a professional ornithological consultant, has run bird tours in Turkey, Cyprus and Australia. His extensive birding experience on six continents and his enormous enthusiasm for teaching will ensure a most rewarding week. Come along and extend your birding knowledge and have loads of fun. Beginners welcome.

BIRDS BY DAY, BATS BY NIGHT AND THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE DARK 15-21 March

Leader: Doug Watkins

Intensive birding in the day and bat banding at night. You will at last have the chance to view, at close quarters, those squeaking creatures which whiz past in the dark. This course offers a wide variety of exciting experiences including some caving while searching for bats. Doug, a past warden at Eyre, and a professional ornithological consultant has an excellent knowledge of the area so that you will have a stimulating and most enjoyable and entertainig holiday.

OTHER COURSES BEING ORGANIZED FOR 1987 :

Photography

Entomology

Botany

History

Caving

### **THE NERD - A SUCCESSFUL NIGHT AT THE THEATRE**

A group of 90 members and friends came along to the opening night of "The Nerd" at the Regal in April. It was good to see such a large group come along and enjoy themselves.

The Nerd was played by Chris Langham, and he had everyone in fits of laughter. The play was funny right to the end, when it was revealed that the Nerd was all a set-up!

The evening raised \$410 towards a replacement vehicle for Eyre. Our thanks go out to John Thornton (Joint Managing Director) for arranging for us to go, and to Claire Condry (Promoter) for her help and advice. Perhaps we will have another evening at the Regal later in the year.

### **REPORT OF THE "BIRDING FOR BEGINNERS" COURSE**

Leader - Steve Keeling

Our decision to spend a few days at Eyre fortuitously coincided with the "Birding for Beginners" course. So we joined the R.A.O.U. and set off.

On our arrival at Cocklebidy we were met with friendship and a delightful level of organisation. By the afternoon we were on the beach for an exhilarating drive, complete with notebooks, binoculars and information about how to record our sightings. Terms like "jizz" and "twitcher" had entered our vocabulary and we were the proud owners of an Eyre Report and a Pizzey.

The small number off people enrolled meant that we each had special attention, but was disappointing given the high quality and enjoyment of the course. But new people arrived daily from London, Melbourne, Caiguna, a grazier and his family from one

of the Nullarbor stations and the crew of a fishing boat (one member literally walked out of the sea, his dinghy having capsized in the evening surf). Still, the only topic of conversation was birds!

Life was full of supprises as we now walked in the bush and on the beach with eyes and ears alert. The sighting of a Mallee Fowl led to the successful search for its mound. That day we had additional exciting bonuses; a Tawny Frogmouth roosting in the burnished trunk of a Mallee and a Dugite, which looked beautiful in its natural habitat.

The Eyre Throstle-toed Easter Rabbit, which had lured us eastwards, eluded our gaze, but we did sample its eggs, accompanied by drinks on the verandah, whilst watching the setting sun and the evening aerobatics of Welcome Swallows. This evening ritual was always followed by a delicious meal prepared by Jan Hill.

The serious matters of birding were then tackled and the day's sightings discussed and recorded. This was followed each night by a "lecture" from Steve, on what was to us, a new aspect of birding. Our knowledge of birds made exponential leaps during the week, and in keeping with the high tone of the course, each student presented a "paper" on a bird observation and on the final night sat an examination. The exam proved to be so hilarious that it was hard for the half drowned fisherman to make his arrival known!

On our last day we sketched birds and then recorded them descriptively. With the help of Steve's sharp eyes, we saw what appeared to be a Sooty Shearwater resting out on the waves. Then another exciting find, a beach washed Southern Giant Petrel. Despite its offensive odour it was taken back to the house and measured, identified and photographed from every angle.

The course was memorable for Steve's knowledge and humour, the company of Bill Graham whose links with the first occupants of the station gave another dimension to our visit, the hospitality and organisation of Jan and Rob Hill and the beauty of the birds, the mallee, dunes, beach and the sunsets reflected in the water and wet sand.

Ralph and Pete Lake

### **W.A. GROUP EXCURSION TO EYRE - May 4 to 10**

Seven members enjoyed the comforts and hospitality of Jan and Rob at Eyre Bird Observatory during what proved to be a happy, if at times exhausting week's birding. Throughout the week the weather was pleasantly mild - ideal birding weather (rain on only one evening). Rob had drawn up a program of entertainment consisting of early morning bush walks around the Observatory and trips throughout the Reserve to view the different habitats and birdlife. By the end of the five days we had seen 69 species, including Red-capped Robins which are a migrant at Eyre and a Redthroat, only observed once before, in 1978.

The first day we were driven along the beach to 9-mile Hut to help in the weekly wader count. 14 species of birds were seen including 2 Double-banded Plovers and a number of Australasian Gannets fishing out to sea.

On Tuesday Rob drove us to Burnabbie, a station deserted early this century, then on across Damper Flats to Burnabbie Rock Hole. After fossicking in the ruins we climbed the escarpment and saw amongst other birds, Yellow-rumped Pardalotes. We lunched in the sunlight under a eucalypt dripping with nectar from the flowering mistletoe, while Mistletoebirds and an assortment of honeyeaters fed above us. After dinner Rob took us spotlighting on the back of a bucking Landrover.

The next day we went on a long drive to Twilight Cove. Highlights of the drive were a pair of Hoary-headed Grebes, a drake Musk Duck swimming near the beach and the 3 Wedge-tailed Eagles soaring overhead as we ate lunch. To walk off lunch some people clambered up the escarpment, which is 120 m high, under the careful watch of the Wedge-tailed Eagles!

Thursday was by way of a "rest day" both for us and our intrepid driver. We took it easy by doing the weekly bush bird count along the East Track, seeing a Southern Scrub-robin and flights of dashing Purple-crowned Lorikeets.

Friday, sadly our last day, Jan drove us up the awesome escarpment to Cocklebidy via Haig Track. Whilst in the bush above the escarpment we had the pleasure of seeing Red-capped Robins

as well as various honeyeaters, thornbills, Weebills and a "jollification" of Jacky Winters. A sad note was to find, well within the boundary of the Reserve, a dead Little Eagle beside a bait set to poison wild dogs.

The very enjoyable week was made more so by the superb evening meals prepared by Jan and Rob, and by their combined helpfulness and enthusiasm as hosts at Eyre. Jan's ploy of awarding a Mars bar to everyone for outstanding achievement, be it spotting an unusual bird or racing up a rocky hill in record time, added to our enjoyment. And, of course, the wonderful sight of 30 or more Pink Cockatoos planeing in for their morning and evening drink will long remain in our memories. A week to be remembered and thought of during the forthcoming dull days of winter.

Margery Clegg and Brian Barrett



*Buff-banded Rail at Alfred Cove: a regular feature.*  
*Photograph by Peel Howden.*

## WADER STUDY GROUP

### WADER BANDING - ALBANY (1985-1986)

After a late start, and with considerable help from Perth-based members of the Wader Study Group, a number of waders were banded. Mist-nets were used at Princess Royal Harbour and Oyster Harbour and in early April nine stints were caught with the cannon net. Species and totals banded :-

Red-necked Stint	71
Red Knot	9
Greenshank	3
Red-capped Plover	1
Large Sandplover	1
Bar-tailed Godwit	1
Curlew Sandpiper	1

Three Red-necked Stints were re-trapped having been banded by Ken Mills at the same site in 1982 (1) and 1984 (2). Vic Smith.

### April 1986 North-West Expedition R.A.O.U. - World Wildlife Fund - Earthwatch

The April expedition to Broome was extremely successful. Although we were unable to band waders, our research programme, outlined in the second circular, achieved some interesting results.

For fourteen days, the team of four (2 Earthwatchers, one New Zealand wader enthusiast and the organiser) spent each day counting waders to determine the proportion of adult birds in flocks. Each evening was spent watching for departing migratory waders and using the radar at the Broome Meteorological Station to monitor migratory departure.

Heavy migration (north-westerly departure) was observed on only four evenings, corresponding with strong south-easterly

winds. These winds were associated with a strong high pressure system over the Great Australian Bight which caused what meteorologists call a south-easterly "surge" effect. Not only does this give the waders clear weather and tail winds in Broome, but it is strong enough to push the equatorial trough well north of the equator. This pushes unsettled weather and tropical storms further north than usual, giving the waders clear conditions and favourable winds all the way to Indonesia and South-east Asia.

Participants were treated to some spectacular sights as flocks of waders flew out to sea on the start of a 2,000 to 3,000 kilometre, 24 to 36 hour flight. Most adult birds were in full breeding plumage and were so heavily laden with fat for the flight north that they usually sat down when roosting on the beaches! From front on they looked like little red, black and white pears.

## WATERBIRD USAGE STUDIES

### A RECONNAISSANCE OF NORTH-EASTERN WETLANDS in W.A.

During the first two weeks of May 1986, I visited remote wetlands in the north-east of Western Australia to assist planning coordinated team surveys at those wetlands later in the year (see below). In ten days I visited the lower Ord River wetlands, Lake Argyle and Lake Gregory, savouring the warmth, relaxed lifestyle and absorbing landscape! I was given a great deal of assistance by Mike and Heather Howell at Kununurra, Chris Done (C.A.L.M. Regional Manager) and Mike Osborn (Wildlife Officer, Wyndham). I am also grateful to the Mulan and Billiluna aboriginal communities for allowing me access to Lake Gregory (near Balgo Mission) and to John Mason and Richard and Muriel Bardon for advice when I arrived in the area.

The LOWER ORD (Marlgu) WETLANDS are largely contained within the Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve and are easily reached from the highway south-east of Wyndham. In the wet season, all or part of the floodplain may be inundated with fresh water, providing breeding habitat for herons, egrets, Magpie Geese and ducks. In the dry period (April to October), the wetland is reduced to deep billabongs and shrinking claypans which can be approached by vehicle where tracks exist. In May 1986, the claypans were teeming with birds, though they could only have persisted for another month. Lingering waders were feeding frantically to prepare for their journey northward, despite frequent disturbance from two pairs of Black Falcons, Marsh Harriers and a goshawk. Noisy throngs of waterfowl loafed amongst flowering lillies and rushes in the deeper waters. Surveys in this area yielded the following results:

\* 26,700 waterbirds (54 species), including 18,400 ducks and geese (10 species).

\* 6500 Hardheads and 6000 Grey Teal.

\* 1500 Sharp-tailed Sandpipers & 350 Black-tailed Godwits.

\* 2 Painted Snipe (rare in W.A.) and a Pectoral Sandpiper.

- also 22 Yellow Chats in tall, flooded herbage and more than 300 Flock Bronzewing.

Little time was spent at LAKE ARGYLE but 12 kilometres of shore in the NE and E of the lake were surveyed. Water-levels were already low, with submerged weed prolific in sheltered bays and inlets. Against the rugged backdrop of the Carr Boyd Ranges, the following results were obtained:

\* 11,300 waterbirds (41 species), including 10,200 ducks and geese (10 species).

\* 6500 Hardheads, in dense packs lurking in the weed-beds.

\* 10 Freckled Duck (rarely seen in the north) and 85 Comb-crested Jacanas.

- parties totalling 50 Flock Bronzewing, coming to drink.

LAKE GREGORY rarely dries out but is usually saline, with little flooded vegetation. A massive flood in Sturt Creek in January 1983 caused the lake to become a fresh wetland roughly 50 kilometres in length. Though much reduced in area by May 1986, Lake Gregory was still fresh and deep, with extensive areas of flooded trees that had been killed by the big flood. High water



