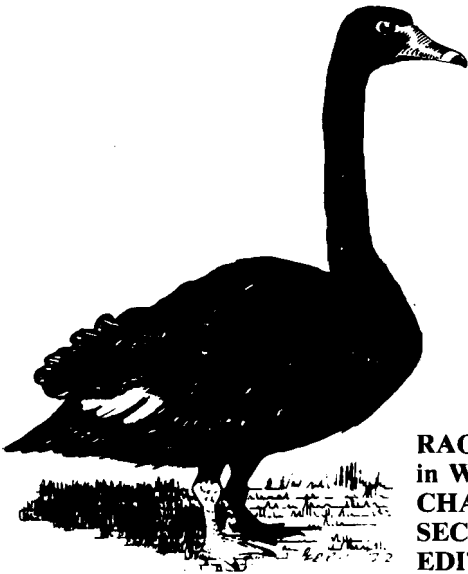


# Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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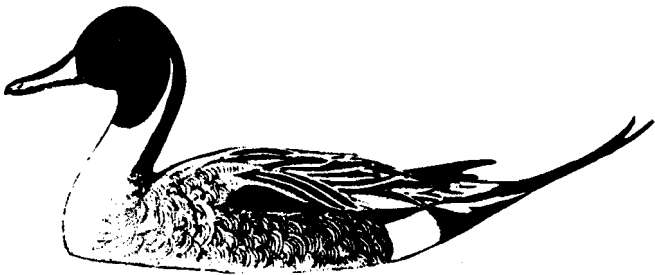
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## A NEW DUCK FOR AUSTRALIA

The first record on a Northern Pintail (*Anas actua actua*) in Australia was recently obtained by George Agar. Chandala Swamp, between Muchea and Gingin, has been observed by George Agar for over four years as part of the South-West Waterbird Survey and it was at Chandala that the Northern Pintail was seen on 12th July 1986. Roger Jaensch and Rodney Vervest also saw the bird on 15th July when it was in the company of Australasian Shovelers and Pacific Black Ducks.

The Northern Pintail was of similar size to the Australian Shovelers and Pacific Black Ducks and was a male in full breeding plumage. In this plumage it has a chocolate brown head and neck, a white breast which extends in a line to the side of the neck, dark grey and white back and flanks and long black tail streamers. It is a dabbling and 'up-end' duck usually most active at dawn and dusk.



'Northern Pintail'

(New Colour Guide to Hong Kong Birds by Phillips & Viney)

The Northern Pintail breeds in Iceland, Great Britain, Northern Scandinavia, Russia, Siberia, Canada and west Greenland. It is occasionally seen in Borneo, Java and Papua New Guinea. Northern Pintails usually winter in western Europe, the shores of the Mediterranean, West Africa, India, Burma and Central America. The Chandala bird may either have migrated southward instead of northward in April-May or have over-flown its usual winter haunts, arriving in Australia last spring. Both explanations have been advanced for other migratory duck species that breed in the northern hemisphere and which have been recorded in Australia - Garganey (seen in several states, in the Kimberley and at Yankechep) and Northern Shoveler (in other Australian states but not yet W.A.).

Chandala Swamp (pronounced as sh and short 'a's) is second only in the South-West to Toolabin Lake for species recorded breeding (20). It is a major breeding site for the Straw-necked Ibis and up to 3000 have been known to congregate there.

## MEETING REPORTS

### WATERBIRDS - 16 June 1986

The SW Waterbird Co-ordinator, Roger Jaensch, spoke of the five years of the SW Waterbird Project. The project was established to obtain an overview of waterbird populations in nature reserves and to assess whether the present reserve system adequately conserves all waterbird species. These objectives were pursued by volunteers making regular counts on wetlands. The number of reserves investigated was close to 200 covering most wetland types but with few rivers, estuaries or yate swamps.

The information collected is now being compiled in report form with a commentary on each wetland covered. The 'best' wetlands depend on the criteria used in such an evaluation but interestingly the Perth Metropolitan area contains three of the most valuable wetlands in Lake Forrestdale, Thomsons Lake and Alfred Cove. Peel Inlet, a substantially larger area, ranks high.

Waterbird research currently conducted by the R.A.O.U. in W.A. includes the annual Great Duck Count, continuing surveillance of some of the more important areas and increased attention to remote wetlands in the State. The talk was illuminated with slides of habitat and birds and left the conviction that there is still plenty of important waterbird survey work to be done, perhaps something for every taste in bird-watching.

B. Buchanan.

### METRO BIRDS - 28 July 1986

Ron Van Delft's enthusiasm and dedication to the Metro Bird Project was very evident at this meeting as he described the setting up of the study and the difficulties encountered in storing the data that has been so willingly contributed by the metrobirders. Ron explained the methods that he had used to analyse the data and gave examples of interesting findings, such as the limits of the Rainbow Lorikeets in the western suburbs. The result of this project will be the publication of 'A Guide to finding birds in Perth' which promises to be a handy guide to local birds and tourists alike.

It was quite a task selecting which 40 sites out of the 118 surveyed should be included in this guide, but Ron based his selection on variety of species, rarities and public access. It is comforting to know that the data obtained from the 78 other sites has not been neglected as it is stored on Department of Conservation and Environment computer and printouts can be made available.

As well as describing good birding spots in the metropolitan area, the book suggests routes through Perth which will take in as wide a selection of sites as possible so that visitors with limited time will be able to see a variety of species and habitats. It will be useful in identifying the birds of Perth as well as bringing together information about parks, reserves and open spaces in the metropolitan area.

B. Hale.

## EXCURSION REPORTS

### **KATHLEEN VALLEY (90 km S of Wiluna): 22-29 June 1986**

Owing to seasonal conditions, the bird population at Wanjarri Wildlife Reserve was very low and species seen were mainly the usual residents of the area. On the two day-trips we were able to make into the Reserve in 4WD vehicles from our camp at Jones Creek, we saw 37 species, perhaps the most notable being a Pink-eared Duck swimming with 18 Grey Teal in the flooded yards of the shearing shed.

Searching through spinifex rewarded us with sightings of Grey-fronted Honeyeaters and Hooded Robins. Venturing into a mulga habitat, we took the road to Blue Bore and bogged the Nissan Patrol truck in what had seemed to be firm enough ground. We thought we might spend the night in the soggy embrace of red mud, but luckily Clive's Subaru pulled us out at last.

The threat of more heavy rains on unsealed roads caused our party of eight to break camp mid-week and five of us were then marooned at Sandstone for two days with all exit roads closed. Here we saw the bower of a Spotted Bowerbird and flushed an Owllet Nightjar from a cave in a breakaway. Those who chose to return via Wiluna got through without difficulty and enjoyed good birding at Tuckanarra.

Future visits to Wanjarri would be better made later in the season or in spring, when herbage and flowering plants have reached maturity, to attract a variety of bird species.

**A. Survivor**

### **PROPOSED BOONANARRING NATURE RESERVE- 12 July 1986**

About 34 people helped to survey birds in this 8000 ha of vacant crown land just to the north of Gingin. The fine weather meant that plenty of birds were about, and a total of 46 species was seen during the day. This included nine species previously unknown for this previously poorly surveyed area, bringing the total known bird species for the area to 63. Highlights of the day included very close views of Wedge-tailed Eagles, excellent views of a Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Hooded and Scarlet Robins, a White-fronted Chat's nest with three eggs, and a Lesser Long-eared Bat caught by Mike Bamford (with his bare hands). Information gained during this excursion will be passed on to CALM to assist in a proposal to acquire the area as a nature reserve.

**Allan Burbidge**

### **POINT WALTER - 15 June 1986**

A small group of birdwatchers gathered together at Point Walter with light rain threatening to mar the morning and keep the birds hidden from view. Fortunately, the rain eased as we made our way around the bush area adjacent to the Point Walter Recreation camp and the Port Lincoln Ringnecks and Red-capped Parrots brought the scene to life.

Three Kookaburras, perched together, watched our progress as we sighted Striated Pardalotes, Red Wattlebirds and Inland Thornbills.

A great deal of flying activity attracted us to one old Tuart where we identified Brown Honeyeater, Grey Fantail, Weebill, Rufous Whistler and Singing Honeyeater. A Galah watched from a nearby dead tree.

Continuing our walk along the 'old tramway' track to Blackwall Reach several groups of Little Black Cormorants were seen flocking to a vantage area on the Point, while on the rocks at the face of the cliffs a male Darter spread his wings.

Near the 'old Cape Horn pub' site on the headland overlooking the Point, a raptor, perched in prominent position allowed the group to have a close-up view. At first thought to be a Goshawk, it was eventually confirmed as a Collared Sparrowhawk as it flew off into the nearby bush.

At the bird count for the morning, 31 species were recorded. Thanks, to those attending for making the morning so enjoyable.

**John Taylor**

### **SEA BIRD OUTING TO NORTH MOLE - 15 June 1986**

Through the early pre-dawn hours of Sunday morning twenty-seven birders lined their stomachs with heavy breakfast (Bread fried in whale oil is the fodder of the 'real' seabirder), clad their shivering bodies with layer on layer of heavy woolly garments

and ventured to the North Mole. Unfortunately the hoped for icy gales from the southern oceans were absent - indeed the weather was quite clement and the seas calm - a truly disappointing sight for the dedicated seabirder.

The morning yielded good views of Gannet - sub-adult and adult- Arctic Jaegers and a single Arctic Jaeger pursuing a Great Skua.

By 9.30am we gave up and repaired to a local coffee house to swap yarns of better days.

**Steve Keeling**

## METRO BIRDER NEWS

Congratulations are due to the RAOU for an AWARD OF MERIT received for the Perth Metropolitan Bird Project from the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation. The Award of Merit was received for the project's initiative in combining a recreational pursuit with the collection of information useful to park managers and for increasing visitation to parks and reserves. The Director, Dr. Stephen Davies, received the award on behalf of the RAOU at the Institute's Annual General Meeting on August 21st 1986.

During the last three months I have had much pleasure from writing and re-drafting "A guide to finding birds in Perth", which is based on over 2000 Metropolitan Bird Project surveys. Everything is going to schedule and I expect to have the final draft of the text at the publisher by the end of August. Special thanks must go to the volunteers who offered their professional skills to type and proof-read the first drafts. They will be acknowledged by name in the book.

When planning the book I thought that once the publishers had the text there was little more to do. This is not so. After the publishers receive the text it is re-typed into their machine, we check for typing errors or omissions, then they cut and paste the text and we again check for errors or omissions. After the cut and paste has been proof-read there is a final chance to check that the publishers did not miss any corrections. If anyone is willing to help me in this task of checking text, please call me at the office.

While the project is almost completed, the next stages are extremely important. These are to organise the launch of the book and then to SELL as many as possible. Good sales will not only please us but also the individual and corporate sponsors who helped make the project possible. Details of the final stages will be in the next edition of W.A. Bird Notes.

**RON VAN DELFT**

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

### **NEW WARDENS FOR EYRE**

In January 1987 we will be leaving Eyre having completed one of our most worthwhile years. Working at Eyre has been the opportunity of a lifetime where we have learnt a lot and gained a great deal of satisfaction. The experience of providing the hospitality and sharing with the guests the joys of this magnificent wilderness area have been most rewarding.

We believe that the attributes required for the wardens positions are a love of the natural environment, a deep commitment to its conservation and an enthusiasm to share these feelings with the guests. A high level of commitment to the work of the RAOU at Eyre, a caring attitude towards one's fellows and a sound knowledge of birds (not necessarily a professional ornithological background) are needed.

Please don't hesitate to contact us (090-393450) or Doug Watkins if you are interested in learning more about the positions and the possibilities.

**Rob and Jan Hill, Wardens, Eyre Bird Observatory**

### **EYRE REPORT**

#### **Course report - 'Eyre's Furry Friends'**

At the end of June seven wide-eyed and willing students presented themselves at the microwave tower to absorb all they could of the pleasures of Eyre. Directed by Doug Watkins and

hosted by Jan and Rob Hill, the Course started on a sunny note and finished that way, but we had to brave the rain for most of the time in-between.

Line pits and Elliot traps were set amongst the mallee along the north track, and another set of line pits were placed in the dunes above the house. Initially slow to respond, the small mammals eventually came to the party, showing a decided preference for the pit traps. Western Pygmy Possums were the main catch. If you haven't experienced this almost-weightless bundle of attractive brown and white fur, be assured that it is something of a wonder. Initially curled tight, head and ears down, eyes closed and tail spiralled, the possum gradually awakens from its torpor as it is rolled from hand to hand, examined, measured and weighed. Being inside the right warm jumper is also an inducement to come to life. Doug made such an impression on the last one that it refused to leave him, bounding delicately after the adopted father-figure as Doug backed away, even managing to climb up his leg.



"Pygmy Possum at Eyre" by R. Smith.

Other trapped mammals were Mitchell's Hopping-mouse and the Dunnart. The highly-strung hopping-mouse is amusing to watch. It quickly and effectively departs with its long tail, tufted at the end and extended horizontally, acting as a counterbalance as the little mechanism on spindly legs bounces away from its spectators. As a farewell gesture a Death Adder lazed nearby in a loose coil to remind us not to wander bare-footed in the bush.

Chocolate Bats were caught at Murra-el-Elevyn Cave near Cocklebiddy. Gaining entry to the cave was by suspended ladders followed by a long rough climb down over rocks and through thick layers of powdery bat guano. Not many bats were present, but the mist net collected enough to keep our cold hands busy. Later in the week we searched for bats and bones at Pannikin Plains Cave and at Tommy Graham's Cave. The bones were sorted and examined later in the comfort of the fire-warmed lounge. One item of significance was the lower jawbone of a small bandicoot which no longer lives in the area.

On the last night, Jan made us the proud recipients of awards for notable achievement in a formal ceremonial occasion. We left Eyre well-feted and well-fed. Congratulations must go to Rob and Jan who maintain their fine reputation as excellent hosts and to Doug who conducted the course with enthusiasm and a lively sense of fun.

Next year it's on again. Set aside a week in March for a stimulating course at Eyre.  
Rod Smith

#### **Relief Wardens**

From time to time relief wardens are required at Eyre while the regular wardens are on holidays or attending seminars and conferences. We are making a list of possible relief wardens. A return bus fare from Perth and free accommodation during the relief period is provided. If you would like your name placed on the list, please let us know, giving the times of the year you could be available with a contact address and phone number.

Rob and Jan Hill

#### **Help!**

The wardens at Eyre need a volunteer to do odd jobs in Perth - such as photocopying and delivering parcels to the Bell Freightlines yard in Guildford. Although not frequent, jobs often need to be done at very short notice. If you are able to help please contact Jan and Rob Hill at 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 Cocklebiddy and Eyre. Families are most welcome.

#### **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 RAOU, will cover a variety of aspects of field ornithology including banding, census and bird behaviour.

#### **1981-85 WATERBIRDS REPORT**

Progress with the big report has been steady and we are not far from sending the manuscript to the publishers. Having a full-time workload with new projects is certainly a handicap. As you can imagine, writing a 100,000 word book is not a task that can be rushed, and we still have to haggle over production details with the government publishers! Consequently we cannot estimate when the report will be finalised - please be patient!

#### **RODNEY RETURNS**

Our stalwart Waterbird Assistant, Rodney Vervest, has returned to the W.A. Office. Funds ran out in about April, but the national RAOU fund-raising exercise realised sufficient money to employ Rodney again (part-time) until about November. Rod will take responsibility for the Regular Monitoring and Byenup Lagoon projects and will assist in other areas such as finishing the Report. Our sincere thanks to all who contributed to the RAOU appeal.

#### **1986-87 SEASON**

Wetlands are looking good for the 1986-87 waterbird breeding season! The Gascoyne and Murchison Rivers have each flooded at least once and Lake Aneen (near Meekatharra) has filled for the second time in three years. Does anyone know about water levels in other inland lakes? In the south of the State, some wetlands are as full as they've been for many years and could still rise higher.

Waterbirds revel in flood conditions and quickly exploit wetlands that have been dry in preceding years. Productivity of waterbird food items is particularly high in wetlands that hold water after dry periods (less so if water also held in subsequent seasons), providing ideal conditions for successful breeding of waterbirds.

The Waterbirds Officer is keen to hear about wetlands (and waterbirds using them) that have 'appeared' this year or are exceptionally deep. This information helps our overall understanding of wetland conditions for 1986-87, which will guide the planning of surveys such as the 1987 Great Duck Count.

#### **REGULAR SURVEYS**

We have had a good response to the request for observers to regularly monitor waterbird populations at important wetlands in W.A. Vacancies still exist at the following wetlands:

WETLAND	SHIRE	FREQUENCY OF SURVEYS
Canning River	Canning	quarterly
Namming Lakes	Dandaragan	every 2 months
Guraga	Lake Dandaragan	quarterly
Toolibin	Lake Wickiepin	every 2 months
Jilakin	Lake Kulin	occasionally
North Lake Grace	Lake Grace	occasionally
Poorarrecup Lake	Cranbrook	occasionally
Yellilup Swamp	Jerramungup	occasionally

If you would like to be involved in this vital study, **please write to me at the RAOU Office** - note that I will be unable to attend to your mail until the third week in September. Information gathered by the RAOU is used in making important planning and management decisions for the wetlands and waterbirds of our State.

Roger Jaensch

#### **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 entertaining holiday.

#### **OTHER COURSES BEING ORGANIZED FOR 1987 :**

Photography  
Entomology  
Botany  
History  
Caving

## **WATERBIRD USAGE**

#### **VASSE ESTUARY**

This important wetland is threatened by proposed urban and recreational developments. Although various developments have been proposed in this area in the past, the latest plans have a great deal of support. Our concern is that the proposals may affect waterbirds directly through disturbance and indirectly through changes to the wetland. In an earlier issue of *W.A. Bird Notes* we revealed that more than 10,000 ducks and swans use the wetland in summer. A survey on 29 May 1986 realised 9300 ducks and swans on the recently filled wetland.

Protection of the Vasse-Wonnerup Estuary System requires continued observations of waterbirds together with representation to planning and local authorities. If you would like to assist in any way, please write to Roger Jaensch at the RAOU Office. Further support from local residents would be especially valuable.

#### **EGRET PERSONS REQUIRED**

One of the projects being tackled by the Waterbirds Officer under the new contract with CALM is an **annual assessment of the breeding status and breeding success of the Great Egret in Western Australia**. This will take the form of visits to known breeding colonies by the Waterbirds Officer and several assistants in late spring. Great Egrets are not abundant and their colonies are few - hence the species is vulnerable. Australia has international obligations to protect this (and other) species because of an agreement with Japan.

To assist our survey, we would welcome any information about egret colonies in your area, including the north of W.A. Surely colonies exist unknown to the RAOU! The best-known colonies are at Australind, Chandala, Toolibin and Ludlow.

It would be especially helpful if one or two persons volunteered to be EGRET OFFICERS. Their role would be to collate published information about egret breeding in W.A. and to assist the Waterbirds Officer in coordinating the 1986 survey. If interested, please write to Roger Jaensch at the RAOU Office.

## **WA SEA BIRD NOTES**

June saw the start of the seabirding season for 1986 with the typical somnambulant seabirder stirring from summer hibernation. We got the thing going by running a seabird slide evening for the RAOU at the Herdsman Wildlife Centre. Steve Keeling spoke of identification problems with albatross and Chris Foot showed some very good slides of the seabirds of North Rankin A. Peter Curry gave an excellent impromptu discussion on identification of skuas, with special reference to the Great Southern Skua which has recently been reported off The Gap at Albany. June 26-27 saw a movement of WASB to check out Cape Leeuwin, staying at the Margaret River Guest House. In spite of the heavy rains the countryside was magnificent and perhaps all the better for being 'out of season'. The Cape turned up one or two surprises. None had seen so many albatross before. It was impossible to estimate accurately but there were several hundred. In addition there were good sightings of both species of Giant Petrel and a single Cape Pigeon (following a crayboat). Other

highlights of the trip were thousands of Purple-crowned Lorikeet and a pair of Square-tailed Kite.

The most notable sea bird sightings were:

- Yellow-nosed Albatross - 300+
- Black-browed Albatross - 1+
- Shy Albatross - 1+
- Southern Giant-Petrel - 1
- Northern Giant-Petrel - 1
- Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 1
- Cape Petrel - 1
- Great Winged Petrel - 1
- Gannet - very large numbers of adult and sub-adult birds
- Pied Cormorant
- Sooty Oystercatcher - 1
- Great Skua - 1
- Pacific Gull - 1 adult

### SEPTEMBER SEA TRIP

We hope to take a boat out from Augusta on the 27th of September. We shall stay at the Margaret River Guest House and hope (weather permitting) to get out on a crayboat for the morning. This will be on a first-in-best-dressed basis with limited room on the boat. Bookings and deposits (\$30) to S. Keeling please. Preference will be given to WASB members.

Hopefully we shall have some really dreadful weather this winter with lots of lovely raging southerly winds. When this happens please give S. Keeling a call on 2917592 as we shall get a beach watch going and spend ages trying to identify the corpses.

### AN ITEM OF INTEREST

Oceanic Birds of South America/ Matthews (1935) says that Mollymauk, according to a learned commentator (Newton, 1896) is a sailors' corruption of an English word which was corrupted from a German word corrupted in turn from the Dutch. It was originally a name of the Arctic Fulmar, the vast flights of which reminded the Dutch Whalemens of "mallemugge," the tiny midges that whirl around a lamp; but today it is applied by mariners of nearly all nations to the smaller albatrosses of the southern oceans. Steve Keeling says that as heard on the whaling brig 'Daisy' in the Roaring Forties, it would be pronounced "Mollymoke".

## WADER STUDY GROUP

Waders; remember them? Despite the absence of a WSG column in Bird Notes over the past 12 months, neither the Group nor the birds have gone away. Wader counts at a number of sites around Perth and elsewhere in the south-west are still being carried out as part of the national wader count programme. Wader counts take place twice a year and you are invited and encouraged to join us and assist us to identify these difficult birds. Contact me to find out arrangements. Wader banding also continues, and it is hoped to go out once a fortnight during the coming season (September - March) to various sites around Perth. If we have time, this will include Rottnest Island, where we may be able to get cheap accommodation.

Everyone is welcome to join in the activities of the WSG, so do come with us to see the waders and get "hands-on" experience of a banding project. Please contact me - my new home number is 444 0482, or speak with me at the next meeting.

Mike Bamford

### SEARCHES FOR COLOUR-DYED WADERS, AUGUST-DECEMBER 1986

As part of the RAOU's Northern Australian Wader Study Expeditions this year, a trip has been organised to the Broome-Port Hedland area of Western Australia in August-September to study the arrival in Australia of waders migrating southwards. During this expedition, some species of waders will be colour-dyed bright yellow in the hope that they will be seen elsewhere in Australia and New Zealand during and after the southward migration. The species involved include Red-necked Stints, and Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, which migrate to Southern Australia,

and Red Knots which probably migrate along the north coast of Australia and on to New Zealand, some touching down in Queensland on the way.

Information about the movements of these species obtained from this exercise can be maximised if searches for colour-dyed waders are made at as many places and as regularly as possible. If anyone is able to assist in this project by searching their local wader haunts for dyed birds this would be greatly appreciated. For instructions and observation recording sheets, please contact: Brett Lane, c/o Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union, 21 Gladstone Street, Moonee Ponds, 3039, Victoria. Ph. (03) 370 1272.

## OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in RAOU 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 winter of 1986. Shire names are given in brackets. Observations that appear in other articles in this newsletter may not be repeated here.

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

### DOWN SOUTH

- Lesser Broad-billed Prion (?) - 1, 28/6, back-yard in Mt Pleasant (Metro).
- Great Egret - 40, 13/4, Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo).
- Australasian Bittern - 1, 8/2, Pipidinny Swamp (Wanneroo).
- Glossy Ibis - 10, 1/6, Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo).  
- 8, July, Herdsman Lake (Metro).  
- 2, July, Perry Lakes (Metro).
- Royal Spoonbill - 1, 2/6, Hartfield Golf Course (Metro).
- Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 25, 30/5, Garrett Rd - old Belmont Tip area (Metro).  
- 30, 12/4, Barrett-Lennard property, W of Gingin.
- Freckled Duck - 1, 16/5 & 16/6, Alfred Cove (Metro).  
- 1, 31/5, Gooninong Swamp, S of Wannamal (Chittering).
- Pink-eared Duck - 1500, 18/6, Yangebup Lake (Metro).
- Blue-billed Duck - 196, 18/5, Bambun Lake (Gingin).  
- 522, 11/7, Dumbleyung Lake (Dumbleyung): highest count from any inland lake.
- Musk Duck - 320, 11/7, Dumbleyung Lake (Dumbleyung).
- Osprey - 1, 10/5, Causeway, Swan River (Metro).  
- 1, early June, Canning River, Mt Henry (Metro).
- White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, April 1985-May 1986, 'Marra', Pallinup River (Jerramungup).
- Spotted Harrier - 1, as above.
- Peregrine Falcon - 1, 21/6, Wellard Clay Pits (Rockingham).
- Spotless Crake - 1, 6/2, Mary Carroll Park (Metro).

Australian Bustard	- 2, 30/3, S of lakes between Jurien Bay and Sandy Cape (Dandaragan).
	- 8, 7/5, 26 km NNW Dongara.
	- 1, 19/5, Nightingale Road (Waroona).
Grey Plover	- 10, 11/6, Leschenault Inlet (Harvey).
Hooded Plover	- 1, immature, 18/5, Lancelin.
	- 1, 15/6, Football Lake, Wannamal (Gingin).
Banded Stilt	- 70, 30/3, between Jurien Bay & Sandy Cape (Dandaragan).
Grey-tailed Tattler	- 3, 8/6, Rushy Point, Albany.
Budgerigar	- 1, April 1985-May 1986, 'Marra', Pallinup River (Jerramungup).
Blue-Bonnet	- 7, 29/6, Newman Rock near Balladonia.
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	- 4, 5/4, 5 km S of York Road (York?).
Barn Owl	- carcass, 23/6, Yangebup Lake (Metro).
	- 1, 8/7, flew across Great Eastern Highway, Redcliffe (Metro).
	- 1, 13/7, Benger Swamp (Harvey).
	- 1, 13/7, South-West Hwy between Harvey & Pinjarra.
Hooded Robin	- 3 pairs, 29/3, Flynn Rd, near The Lakes (Northam?).
	- 2, 17/5, 5 km S of York Road (York?).
Western Yellow Robin	- 20+, 22/3, Flynn Rd, near The Lakes (Northam?).
Crested Shrike	- tit - 3, 28/6, as above.
Orange Chat	- 3, 29/6, Newman Rock near Balladonia.
Spotted (Western) Bowerbird	- 1, 13/6, 16 km S of Mullewa.

## UP NORTH

Cattle Egret	- 2, 6/7, Lake Eda, E of Broome.
Black Swan	- 10, 23/6, Koolan Island.
	- 3, 2/7, Mary River near highway.
	- 12, 9/7, Ord River at Kununurra.
	- early July, near Wyndham.
Whistling-Ducks	- scarce in SW Kimberley in July.
Square-tailed Kite	- 1, 21/6, Mount House.
	- 1, 4/7, Broome, near port.
Black-breasted Buzzard	- 14, 17/4-22/6, Broome area.
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	- 2 at nest, 21/6, Dunham R, Kununurra.
Black Falcon	- 1, 6/7, Lake Eda, E of Broome.
Chestnut Rail	- 7, 1/6, Prince Regent River.
Australian Bustard	- 41, 21/6, Beverley Springs.
Red-necked Avocet	- 59, 25/6, Crab Creek near Broome.
Eastern Curlew	- 50, 29/3, tidal mudflats E of Derby.
Little Curlew	- 210, 15/4, Derby School Oval, feeding on cut-worms.
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove	- 1, 2/6, St Patrick's Island.
Partridge Pigeon	- nest with 2 eggs, 30/5, Prince Regent R.
White-quilled Rock Pigeon	- adult with young, 14/5, Sale River.
Rainbow Pitta	- 2, 14/5, Sale River.
Welcome Swallow	- 12, 22/7, Broome Rubbish Tip.
White-browed Robin	- 1, 21/6, Beverley Springs.
Purple-crowned Fairy Wren	- 4, 26/7, Geikie Gorge.
Black Grasswren	- 6, 1/6, Prince Regent River.
Yellow Chat	- 22, (late May?), Lake Eda, E of Broome.
Gouldian Finch	- July, 'Fish Hole', Gibb River Rd.

## MEMBER' CONTRIBUTIONS

### RUDALL RIVER NATIONAL PARK

Rudall River was named after a surveyor, A.F. Rudall, who explored much of what is now the Rudall River National Park in the late 1890s. Rudall was the leader of an expedition searching for two missing explorers and the river was discovered by a fellow surveyor and second in command of the expedition, H.S. Trotman, who named the river after his colleague. Rising in no specified range of hills but deriving from surrounding break-aways, the river and its tributaries are wholly within the southern part of the Great Sandy Desert. The Rudall River National Park, a very large area around the river, is all within The Great Sandy Desert.

Recently we spent (together with another WA birdo and one from Victoria) five days and four nights in the Park - as the tourist brochures would say.

Although Trotman described a "waste and desolate land", "brittle and blackened trees, every ounce of moisture wrung from their heat twisted limbs, strained in weird shapes away from the sun" \* and "pitiless" and "unbearable" heat, he travelled in December. The brittle blackened and heat twisted trees may still be seen but in July the evenings and nights were cool and we even experienced some light rain. The plant and tree life is much greater than the image conjured by the Great Sandy Desert and trees grow well near water. The size of the Rudall was of interest. When in full spate it must be very impressive. Dry during our visit, the bed shows that it reaches 50 metres wide and 4 metres deep, while named tributary creeks range from the size that might be expected by the name creek, to 30 metres wide and 3 metres deep. However, it seemed that water had not flowed significantly for at least two years.

The rivers and creeks are lined with River Red Gum (*E. camuldensis*), unfortunately not in flower at the time of our visit and they form a sharp contrast to the bare stony soil of the break-aways and sparse vegetation of the sandy plains. At one time I thought we would see more camels than anything else but diligent bird watching (two hours careful looking to see one bird for example) gradually resulted in a list of 31 species though with no surprises among them. Australian Bustards were reasonably common and the White-plumed Honeyeater seems present along all water courses in good numbers. A male and a female Black Honeyeater were seen during a long afternoon seeing no other birds but a few White-plumed Honeyeaters. Except after rain it seems likely that the Rudall River Park is disappointing from a bird viewpoint. However, judging by the number of old nests along water-courses, after rain (which could make access difficult) it would be an exciting place. In the surrounding country the Black-faced Wood-swallow was by far the most common bird. The general paucity of life doubtless contributed to the seeing of two raptors only, a Brown Falcon and an Australian Kestrel. We were pleased to see a group of Spinifexbirds which passed our camp at lunchtime, and to get a good view of a Red-browed Pardalote - a few of which called from time to time. There was a variety of flowers especially of *Eremophila* species, which gave interest when birds were absent.

More exciting birding was available on the journey to and from the Park. A Grey Falcon gave us a good viewing south of Marble Bar while working over an area with a Spotted Harrier, 1000+ Little Corellas at Green Hole on Miningarra Creek south of Bamboo, 200+ Hardhead (with Swan and egrets etc.) at Carawine Gorge on the Oakover River (the upper De Grey), and most interesting of all a Tawny Grassbird at Coppin Gap, a river gorge leading from the hills (the Dyke Range?) to the plains bordering the De Grey. When the river is not running the Gap contains permanent pools with the biggest and deepest lined with *Baumea* and Great Rush. The Tawny Grassbird was sighted in this pool margin and it not only climbed up obligingly to view the intruders but then proceeded to sing before giving warning calls and dropping into cover. It repeated this performance after flying low, just over the reeds to their most distant extremity (30 metres).

\* Smith E. The Beckoning West, St. George, Perth 1985. pp68-9.



*This Tawny Frogmouth successfully raised two chicks in a pine tree during December 1985. The nest was located in Bickley.*

*Photograph by Brian R. Tullis, 101 Railway Road, Kalamunda 6076.*

The Tawny Grassbird is usually seen in the Kimberley and northwards, cut off from the Pilbara by the Great Sandy Desert. Only one was seen.

On the journey south-bound, a Jacky Winter and an Australian Hobby came to our camp, still in the Desert, just outside the Park boundary (previously unreported from that particular Atlas 1 degree block) and a Black-breasted Buzzard near what appeared to be its nest was spectacular on the middle Gascoyne River at Three Rivers Station (also previously unreported from the Atlas block).

Travelling with our party you would have concluded that the Crested Bellbird was the most common species in the State. It was heard (but never seen) at all our camp sites near Marble Bar, on the De Grey, Rudall, in the south of the Desert, on the Fortescue, Gascoyne, Murchison and north of Kalgoorlie at Niagara.

A. and B. Buchanan

#### **BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPERS AT GORDON INLET (FITZGERALD RIVER NATIONAL PARK)**

Sightings of the Broad-billed Sandpiper have been rare in the southern parts of Australia. In the "WA Naturalist" Vol. 16, No.1, Roger Jaensch records observations at Esperance and Perth. On the 12th September, 1985, two Broad-billed Sandpipers were seen at Gordon Inlet during a biological survey of the Park.

The sandpipers were feeding with 25 Red-necked Stints and 4 Curlew Sandpipers, and were seen at a distance 18-25 metres. We had binoculars and Pizzey, which was hurriedly opened to Plate 34. The size of each species accorded with Pizzey -the Broad-billed Sandpipers being intermediate between the other two species. In shape the Broad-billed sandpipers were very similar to the Red-necked Stints, with short legs and necks. However, their beaks were proportionately longer and sturdier. The Red-necked Stints were in non-breeding plumage and the Broad-billed Sandpipers had a very similar distribution of white and colour, and in this respect matched the illustrations in Pizzey. We failed to notice whether the eyebrow of the Broad-billed Sandpiper was forked. They had a darker edge to the wing than the stints and it, the dark part, seemed both broader than in the illustration and continuous rather than with a gap. The sandpipers' legs appeared darker than in the Pizzey illustration though not as black

as those of the Red-necked Stint. We could not be certain of the down-turn of the beak-tip as the beaks were in constant use. The length of the beak seemed right. All three species were feeding -moving briskly and probing frequently. The Broad-billed Sandpipers moved and fed in the same way as the Red-necked Stints with rapid vertical probes.

B.Newbey.

#### **BIRD AWARENESS IN COUNTRY SCHOOLS**

Last year I ran a series of school visits with the aim of increasing awareness of birds. The ten schools visited were between 10 and 170 kms from home. (Home is a farm in the southern wheatbelt of WA). It was done free of charge though I was paid for the travelling and overnight stays involved from funds made available by the Priority Country Areas Programme. Some schools received two visits, some one; some classes I saw twice for up to one and a quarter hours each time, some only once for an hour. But all schools offered the visits accepted.

Aids were a few stuffed specimens from our local museum; six common but contrasting nests - Magpie, Mudlark, Willie Wagtail, Singing Honeyeater, Fieldwren, Yellow-rumped Thornbill; a clutch of blown Banded Lapwings eggs that had been deserted during cropping on the farm; a Bustard feather; some owl pellets; a few Emu droppings plus the unlikely looking food items that they revealed that the Emus had been eating; some nectar filled blossoms; and a small selection of taped birdcalls. Last but not least was the Bird Observers' Club contribution. This comprised slides, the cassette set "Day in the Life of a Magpie", and some pamphlets. Of course not everything was used for every class.

Topics touched on included interesting aspects of local birdlife and what you could see if you were more observant. Children learned readily to distinguish between male, female and immature Mudlarks for example. It was emphasised that the local birdlife is interesting, diverse, right there for the learning, unique, and much is yet unknown. Depending on the age of the students, which ranged between 5 and 15, such things as social organisation, territories, food, flight, migration, nomadism, changes in bird species as the environment has changed, were discussed. All were related to local examples and preferably common local examples.

If the weather was good, and it frequently wasn't, some time

