

# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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## AFTER 50 YEARS BANDED STILT BREEDING AT LAKE KING

Following a phone call on the 3 August from local farmers Sylvia and Ian Brandenburg, I decided to investigate reports of large numbers of Banded Stilt with chicks observed from the causeway over Lake King on the Hyden-Ravensthorpe Road. Lake King is an ephemeral salt lake approximately 450 km south east of Perth.

On the 4th August with the help of Ian Brandenburg I made an aerial survey of Lake King and the surrounding lakes. As groups of birds were seen, their numbers and approximate positions were transferred on to a map of Lake King. All adults and chicks were seen in the water or on exposed mud flats. No birds were seen at possible nesting sites (e.g. sandy islands, spits or adjacent shorelines).

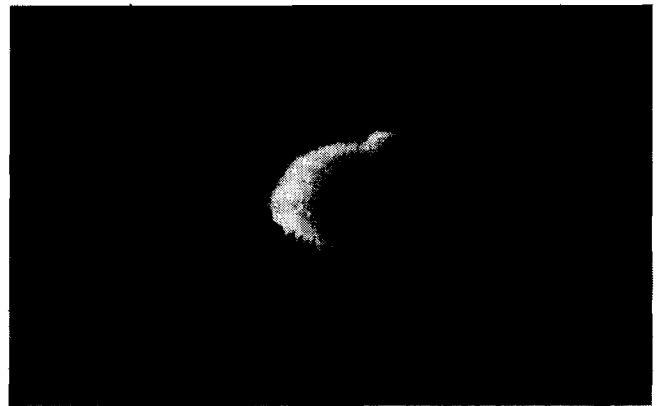
Estimates made from the aerial survey totalled approximately 4000 adults and 7000 chicks on Lake King. On Lake Camm, immediately to the north of Lake King a single flock of about 1000 adult birds were seen. Lakes Ronnerup, Milarup and Pallarup to the south east of Lake King had Banded Stilt on them.

On the next day I walked an area extending five kilometres south from the Lake King causeway. On the ground it was obvious that the bird numbers counted from the aerial survey were a gross underestimation - by as much as three to four times. All birds were again seen in shallow water or exposed mud flats. Groups varied in their composition from one adult with two chicks to 30 adults with 200 chicks. Some chicks had become separated, unable to keep up with a group.

Many dead chicks were seen on the shorelines of the lake and its numerous islands. Most appeared to be about a week old and were pure white except for a black bill, black eye and grey legs. On the 7 August a very young chick possibly only about a day old was seen on the western side of the Lake.

I searched numerous islands and spits on Lake King for signs of a rookery but without success. This was not so surprising as Lake King is approximately 35 km long and up to 10 km wide. I was only able to search a fraction of this area and the aerial survey gave me no indication as to where the rookery might be. Typically, the islands in the Lake were up to a metre above the mud flat level and vegetated with low samphire and *Rhagodia* with occasional small trees (*Callitrus* sp.). Remains of chicks were often found around the base of these small trees. Small groups of Raven were seen around the Lake but the only raptor sighted was a Wedge-tailed Eagle. Fox prints were seen on some exposed mud flats.

Like many wheatbelt areas, this year (1988) Lake King has received substantial autumn and winter rainfall. From the beginning of March to the end of July, Lake King has recorded



*Banded Stilt chick, Lake King - 5.8.88*

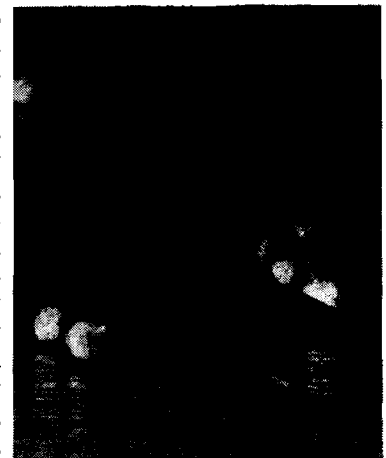
213 mm and the depth of water in Lake King was up to 30 cm.

Banded Stilt were seen feeding on small black ostracod crustaceans in the water. Brine shrimps documented as a main component of the diet of Banded Stilt were not numerous in Lake King. However, they were numerous in the adjacent lakes not being used by the Banded Stilt. Large flocks of Banded Stilt were also seen on Lake Grace; however, there was no sign of breeding having occurred.

The nesting habits of Banded Stilt were first described from a colony at Lake Grace in 1930. A breeding attempt (or success) was also made at Lake King in the same year. No further breeding has been recorded from Lake King until August, 1988.

A. Bougher

This report appears to confirm that brine shrimps are not vital to the breeding of the Banded Stilt. This was recorded in the Coorong in 1981 and 1982 (Lane, B.A. 1987, *Shorebirds in Australia*, Nelson, Melbourne). The "creche" formation may not have been previously reported and is supported by Pringle J.D. (1987) *The Shorebirds of Australia*, Angus and Robertson, N.S.W.



*Banded Stilt and chick, Lake King*

## OBSERVATIONS

Please send details of sightings to 'Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the RAOU. Unusual sightings should be accompanied by field notes. Preliminary checking of the following observations has been undertaken but further scrutiny should be given prior to inclusion in any official or technical report. This list of observations mainly covers the period from August 1988 to October 1988.

### DOWN SOUTH

**Great Crested Grebe** - 1, 26/10/88, Lake Joondalup: nest with young - GL

**Hoary-headed Grebe** - 28/9/88, Toolibin Lake: at least four nests with eggs, on small islets (lake shallow) - RJ

**Southern Giant-Petrel** - 1, 10/7/88, North Mole (Fremantle) - RAOU

**Hutton's Shearwater** - 30+, 14/10/88, Point Peron (Rockingham) - GM

**Great Cormorant** - 17, 28/9/88 Blackwatch Swamp (W of Coolup): three pairs breeding - RV, BCa

**Pacific Heron** - nest with two chicks, 22/10/88, Hurstview Lake (Dandaragan Shire) - ABu, BBu

**Cattle Egret** - 2, 11/9/88, paddock near Kogolup Lake (Cockburn Shire) - DJ, BF \* 12, 29/9/88, in pasture with cattle, near Jerdacuttup Lake (E of Hopetoun) - RJ

**Great Egret** - September-October 1988: active colonies at Needoonga Lake (45 pairs), Chandala Swamp (5 pairs), South Perth Zoo (7 pairs?), West Corio Swamp (42 pairs) South Munginup Swamp (10 pairs?), Rosamel Swamp (3 pairs), Australind Egret Swamp (16 pairs), McCarley's Swamp (55 pairs) - a total of ca. 183 breeding - RV, RJ

**Little Egret** - 15, 6/3/88, Creery Island (Peel Inlet) - GM \* 1, 29/5/88, perched on top of dead pine tree in Ferndale - MB \* 4, 12/9/88, Goegrup Lake - AD \* 2, 28/10/88, West Corio Swamp (N of Pinjarra): nest with eggs - RV This is the third breeding locality in southern W.A. in addition to Australind, and Caris Park Rd Swamp (S of Pinjarra)

**Little Bittern** - 1, 30/9/88, swamp near Woodup Swamp (E of Esperance) - RJ \* 1, 2/10/88, swamp E of Mortijinup Lake (Esperance Shire) - JE Both are new localities for this species. \* nest with five eggs, 3/11/88, Herdsman Lake - SG

**Australasian Bittern** - 1, 30/9/88, swamp near Woodup Swamp (E of Esperance) - RJ \* 2, September-October 1988, Mettler Lake (NE of Albany) - PL \* 1, 27/10/88, Bengier Swamp - RV, SS

**Sacred Ibis** - 80+ pairs breeding, 17/9/88, swamp near south end of Harvey Estuary - RJ

**Straw-necked Ibis** - 150+ pairs breeding, 27/10/88, Crackers Swamp (Dandaragan Shire) - RJ

**Royal Spoonbill** - a pair at nest with eggs, 17/9/88, swamp near south end of Harvey Estuary - RJ (This is the second breeding record for the south-west, the first being at Barraghup Swamp (near Mandurah) in September 1985) \* 1, 29/9/88, in flooded pasture near Jerdacuttup Lake (E of Hopetoun) - RJ

**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** - 15 pairs breeding, 17/9/88, swamp near south end of Harvey Estuary - RJ \* 3, 23/10/88 Mettler Lake (NE of Albany): nest with one large young - PL \* 31/10/88, swamp west of Bambun Lake (Gingin Shire): colony of 10 breeding pairs sighted during aerial survey - RJ, RV

**Plumed Whistling-Duck** - 7/9/88, Paynes Find to Yalgoo Road - JMa

**Freckled Duck** - 1, 25/8/88, Toolibin Lake (lake probably too shallow for breeding) - GP, RV, SH \* up to 5, including three coloured males, 13/8 to 22/10/88, Gibbs Rd Swamp (Armadale Shire): a nest with eggs, some ready to hatch was found on 22/10/88 - DJ, RJ, RV \* a male on 14/9/88 and a pair on 26/9/88, shrubby swamp near Jurien Bay - NT, RJ \* 1, 18/9/88, swamp 20 km S of Coorow - SF, AF \* a pair, 26/9/88, thicket swamp near Jurien Bay (separate swamp to abovementioned) - RJ \* 3, 28/10/88, Chandala Swamp: a pair, and a second coloured male attempting to win the paired female - RJ

**Chestnut Teal** - 6, 29/9/88, lower reaches Jerdacuttup River (near Hopetoun): with young - RJ

**Australasian Shoveler** - 20, plus two clutches of young, 28/10/88, Cockleshell Gully (fresh) Lake - RJ

**Hardhead** - 191, 16/7/88, Namming Lake (Dandaragan Shire) - ABu, BBu \* 28-29/9/88, frequently seen in flooded wetlands from Lake Grace to Bremer Bay - RJ \* 27/10/88, Crackers Swamp (Dandaragan Shire): nest with four eggs and nest with 12 eggs in *Baumea articulata* - RJ \* 5/11/88, Gibbs Rd Swamp (Armadale Shire): nest with nine eggs in paper-bark fork - RJ

**Blue-billed Duck** - 32, 1/10/88, Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup Shire): paired and displaying - RV, BCa

**Black Kite** - 1, 16/10/88, near Ocean Reef Road (Joondalup): tail twisting and wing shape noted - SL (Record requires confirmation)

**Square-tailed Kite** - 1, 2/7/88, Kelmscott - PCu \* 1, 18/9/88 & 4/10/88 at nest in jarrah/wandoo woodland, near Frankland - RW, RJ \* 24/9/88, Boyagin Rock - PRH \* 1, 2/10/88, near Bannitup Lake (Esperance) - RJ

**White-bellied Sea-Eagle** - 1, 3/9/88, Swan River near St Annes Hospital - SL

**Little Eagle** - 1, 18/8/88, Mt Lawley - RV

**Spotted Harrier** - 1, 8/10/88, Forrestdale Lake - PRH

**Peregrine Falcon** - pair nesting on cliff, August-September 1988, NE of Mingenev - CN, WN

**Buff-banded Rail** - 13, 10/1/88, Alfred Cove - GM

**Baillon's Crake** - 1, 28/9/88, Caris Park Rd Swamp (S of Pinjarra): flushed from small area of flooded pasture - RV, BCa

**Bush Thick-knee** - 2, 22/8-17/9/88, Seabrook (SE of Northam): heard calling and observed sheltering in clump of trees a pair or more has bred here for many years, rarely moving away except when paddocks are being cropped - LM

**Sooty Oystercatcher** - 32, 2/8/88, Leeuwin-Naturaliste NP - KH

**Hooded Plover** - 539, 9/4/88, Lake Warden (Esperance) - GM (Possibly the largest group recorded in W.A.) \* 260, 1/10/88, Karbul Lake (Esperance Shire) - RJ

**Large Sand Plover** - 3, 2/11/88, Alfred Cove - JH, PRH

**Banded Stilt** - 3000, September 1988, a small lake at Nambaling (W of Dowerin) - CN, WN \* thousands, September-October 1988, Lake King: including young birds and many dead juveniles - SH & others. (Banded Stilts bred at or near Lake King in winter-spring 1988, but the nesting site was not located. Please report observations of breeding Banded Stilts as soon as possible)

**Wood Sandpiper** - 4, 25/8/88, Toolibin Lake: new species for Toolibin - GP, RV, SH

**Terek Sandpiper** - 1, 13/9/88, Alfred Cove - JD

**Black-tailed Godwit** - 3, 22/11/87, mouth of Collie River - GM \* 1, 2/8/88, Leeuwin-Naturaliste N.P. - KH

**Red Knot** - 49, 12/10/88, Woodman Point - DN

**Great Knot** - 153, 6/2/88, Alfred Cove - GM

**Little Stint (?)** - a possible juvenile, 17/10/88, Alfred Cove: dark cap, split supercilium and bright white mark on back - RJ  
**Red-necked Stint** - a 'white bird', 10/9/88, Alfred Cove - JD  
**Sanderling** - 37, 10/12/87, Woodman Point - GM \* 7, 27/7/88, Hamelin Bay (near Augusta) - KH  
**Fairy Tern** - 50, 5/9/88, Lake Clifton - AD  
**Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo** - pair at nest with chick in woodland near North Bannister, 29/10/88 - SF, AF  
**Regent Parrot** - 12+, 2/7/88, Kelmscott - PCu  
**Cockatiel** - 1, 15/10/88, swamp near Westfield Park Primary School - GMa  
**Ground Parrot** - 4, 6/10/88, Fitzgerald River N.P.: along Fitzgerald Track - GHo (Imitation of call was given and three birds were identified from responding calls and one was seen)  
**Fairy Martin** - 1, 3/9/88, Ellendale Water, N of Mingenew - BWn  
**Crested Shrike-tit** - 2, 27/8/88, Flynn Rd (Mundaring Shire) - BBA, MC  
**Chiming Wedgebill** - 7/9/88, near east side of Lake Moore on Maranalgo Station: Southern limit? - JMa  
**Variiegated Fairy-wren** - 5, 16/10/88, Kings Park Botanic Gardens: one coloured male and four uncoloured birds - DM  
**Western Bristlebird** - 9, 6/10/88, near location for Ground Parrot (above): all singing males - GHo  
**Grey Honeyeater** - 1, 23/9/88, Mt Magnet to Yalgoo Rd, near Munbinia turnoff: singing bird was recognised from tape recording - GHo \* 2, 24/9/88, Yalgoo road east of Mullewa: in low shrubs adjacent farm land; short bill noted - BBA, ND \* 4, early October, Z-Bend Gorge (Kalbarri) - DM  
**Pied Honeyeater** - 24/9/88, Wanarra Station (43 km ESE Perenjori): nest with small young - RJ  
**Red-eared Firetail** - 1, 25/9/88, Poison Gully (Armadale Shire) - GMa  
**Australian Magpie** - immature, 21/10/88, Rottnest Island at West End - PP (Magpies occur as vagrants on Rottnest - RV)

#### UP NORTH

**Least Frigatebird** - 1, 10/5/88, Point Quobba (Carnarvon): immature - GM  
**Red-tailed Tropicbird** - three pairs breeding, September 88, Pelsart Island (Abrolhos) - HP (Breeding has been recorded previously on the Abrolhos but according to the Atlas, not since 1954 - RV)  
**Cattle Egret** - 10/10/88, Broome sewage ponds - BW, GH  
**Royal Spoonbill** - 1, 15/9/88, Rudall River N.P. (Codbro Pool) - MBo  
**Square-tailed Kite** - 10-24/8/88, dunes near Broome jetty - BW, GH  
**White-bellied Sea-Eagle** - 1, 21/8/88, lower Dunham River (Kununurra): nest with month-old chick - MH \* five nests with young, September 1988, Alrolhos Islands - HP  
**Grey Falcon** - 1, 16/9/88, Balfour Downs Station (East Pilbara) - MBo (Description supplied)  
**Grey-tailed Tattler** - 288, 9/5/88, Babbage Island (Carnarvon) - GM  
**Terek Sandpiper** - 6, 21/9/88, Wyndham Port - KO  
**Sanderling** - 1, 26/9/88, Quarry Beach (Broome): not common on Broome beaches - BW, GH  
**Little Bronze-Cuckoo** - 18-30/8/88, observatory grounds - BW, GH  
**Barn Swallow** - 50+, 29/10/88, Derby sewage Pond - LV, PM

**Yellow Wagtail** - 5, 29/10/88, Derby sewage Pond - LV, PM  
**Kimberley Flycatcher** - 2/8/88 & 18/9/88, Crab Creek (Broome): on each occasion, two birds flying above mudflat - BW, GH (Record requires confirmation)  
**Little Shrike-thrush** - 4-17/8/88, Broome observatory grounds, during sudden hot spell - BW, GH  
**Thick-billed Grasswren** - 4, 3/5/88, Peron Peninsula - GM \* 1, 18/9/88, Monkey Mia - BBA, MC  
**Black-tailed Treecreeper** - 4, 7/8/88, Fortescue River bridge at Coastal Highway - AJo, RJo  
**Grey-headed Honeyeater** - 9-11/9/88, edge of Roebuck Plain (Broome) - BW, GH  
**Gouldian Finch** - 41, 14/9/88, Wyndham garden - KO

#### KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

ABu	- Anne Buchanan	KH	- Katherine Highman
AD	- Austin Daw	KO	- Kimberley Observer
AF	- Austin Fincham	LM	- Lindsay Milhinch
AJo	- Allan Jones	LV	- Lee Vernon
BBA	- Bryan Barrett	MB	- Max Bailey
BCa	- Ben Carr	MBo	- Mariee Bougher
BBu	- Bruce Buchanan	MC	- Margery Clegg
BF	- Bryony Fremlin	MH	- Mike Howell
BW	- Brice Wells	ND	- Norma Duff
BWn	- Brian Wilson	NT	- Noel Tyrer
CN	- Clive Napier	PCu	- Peter Curry
DJ	- David James	PL	- Pattie Leighton
DM	- Dusty Millar	PM	- Pam Masters
DN	- Doug Nash	PP	- Peter Pickford
GH	- Gail Hooper	PRH	- Peel Howden
GHo	- Glenn Holmes	RJ	- Roger Jaensch
GL	- Graham Little	RJo	- Rose Jones
GM	- Gordon McDonald	RV	- Rodney Vervest
GMa	- G. Marston	RW	- Rita Watkins
GP	- Grant Pearson	SF	- Sandra Fincham
HP	- Howard Parker	SG	- Sue Gordon
JD	- Jack Donohoe	SH	- Stuart Halse
JE	- Jack Ewert	SL	- Sophia Le Faucheur
JH	- Jack Hunt	SS	- Sheryl Stephens
JMa	- Jim Masters	WN	- Wendy Napier

## NATIONAL BIRD WEEK

This year the sub-committee organising activities for Bird Week approached all secondary schools in Western Australia asking if they would participate in activities and have displays for this occasion.

The response was excellent with 71 government and private schools responding to our offer of materials for displays and 29 schools requesting speakers or leaders for bird walks. Twenty six country schools as far apart as Esperance, Newman and Kununurra were involved and in several of these country centres we were able to have our members as speakers.

A competition for secondary schools was widely publicised and the winner of the award was Martin Cake of Kalumunda Senior High School for his excellent study of the Boobook Owl. The competition will again be held in 1989.

The sub-committee thanks all those members who so willingly helped to make this a very worthwhile and successful event for the W.A. Group.

A. Jones

## WATERBIRD STUDIES

### ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNTS

From the experience of the RAOU's "Great Duck Count", we have established a new, and hopefully permanent enquiry: the BI-ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNTS. The counts will be made each year at the end of the waterfowl breeding season (November) and late in the dry season (March). We have secured funding from the Department of Conservation and Land Management for three years, i.e. six counts for the project. THE ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNTS have two main objectives:

- (1) to provide an index of annual abundance of ducks, swans and coots in south-western Australia, and
- (2) to compare regional distribution of waterfowl and types of wetlands used by them in the breeding and non-breeding seasons.

The project will be more precise than the "Great Duck Count". There will be a fixed set of wetlands, chosen by RAOU and CALM from the results of previous work and designed as a good representative sample of wetlands in the South-West and Eucla Land Divisions. Each observer will generally be allocated 2-4 small lakes or swamps, 2 river pools and 5 farm dams to survey in the nine day Count period.

Observers are not required to have previous experience in counting waterfowl, though this would be helpful, but we expect their surveys to be thorough and consistent. We hope that observers will survey their allocated wetlands in each of the first six Counts (November 1988 to March 1991), but we should be able to find replacements if needed.

THE ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNTS will be given a high public profile and will be of great benefit to the understanding and conservation of ducks, swans and coots in Western Australia.

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US in this vital research. Many of you will have already participated in the November 88 count. The second count of the first year of study will be in March 1989 (dates to be advised).

### COASTAL PLAIN PROJECT

RAOU is seeking funds from the Water Authority for a three year study of waterbird breeding on the Swan Coastal Plain. (Money for our full-time staff runs out in April 1989!!) Our proposal has not been successful thus far, but we are still hopeful.

### ROUTINE WATERBIRD SURVEYS

Formal collection of waterbird data from routine surveys of wetlands has now come to an end. Results from 1981-5 surveys in nature reserves have been summarised in RAOU Report No. 30 (see below), which is with an editor in Melbourne and should hit the streets early in 1989. Results from 1985-8 surveys of important and threatened wetlands have been summarised on computer and a report is currently being prepared. This report would also indicate the scope of RAOU data available for other wetlands for which we have received data in the period 1981-8.

The reports will be immensely helpful to CALM in its task of managing wetlands and waterbirds in W.A. Your work in collecting waterbird information has alerted CALM about many important waterbird breeding and refuge areas that were previously unknown.

RAOU generally gets some income from charges for access to its waterbird data. This revenue is sufficient to cover costs of computing small to moderate volumes of waterbird data. We are therefore able to store further incoming data and produce an annual printout of new information.

If you wish to continue counting waterbirds at a wetland in W.A., we will happily accept your data for storage in the "Waterbird Data Bank". We are always keen to get data from "new" wetlands and from important and threatened wetlands. The Bank will be accessible, at cost, to government and industry, for approved management and conservation purposes. In addition, we may continue to scan incoming data sheets for interesting records to be included in 'Observations' in W.A. Bird Notes. We cannot, however, guarantee that data from your future survey work will be included in a formal publication such as an RAOU Report.

### REPORTS OF RECENT WORK

The following RAOU Reports are now available, at a cost of \$5.00 including postage, from the Perth Office.

*Ducks, swans and coots in south-western Australia: the 1986 and 1987 counts*, RAOU Report No.31, by R. Jaensch and R. Vervest (1988); 32 pages.

*Ducks, swans and coots in south-western Australia: the 1988 count and recommendations*, RAOU Report No.46, by R. Jaensch and R. Vervest (1988); 26 pages.

*Waterbirds in the Eastern Muir Wetlands, 1986-1987*, RAOU Report No.47, by R. Jaensch and R. Vervest (1988); 21 pages.

The following RAOU reports are in preparation or in press:

*Waterbirds in Nature Reserves of South-western Australia, 1981-1985: Reserve Accounts*, RAOU Report No.30, by R. Jaensch, R. Vervest and M. Hewish: ca. 250 pages.

*Waterbirds at Remote Wetlands in Western Australia, 1986-8*, RAOU Report No.32, by R. Jaensch and R. Vervest: ca. 80 pages.

Reports on Important and Threatened Wetlands (1985-8), Egret Breeding Colonies and Australasian Bitterns are due to be prepared in the next few months.

As reports are published, complimentary copies should be mailed by us to participants in the projects. If you think you have missed out, please let us know.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all RAOU members and friends who have contributed in any way to RAOU Waterbird Research in the past 7-8 years. Much has been achieved through your enthusiastic and dedicated efforts, for the benefit of waterbirds in Western Australia.

R. Jaensch & R. Vervest

## BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

Following the last RAOU Council and Research Committee meetings, we have been able to make headway at last. The pit toilets and bush showers, tolerable to those who roughed it for a couple of days, have become history. Their passing was noted, but not mourned. We still have a water problem, but a generous grant from CALM will ensure we can solve it and also instal some form of fencing.

Largely due to the generosity of the W.A. Group and aided by assistance from Jock McLaren and John Malcolm, the wiring of doors and windows is virtually finished. The film night presented by Kevin Coate, with assistance from The Friends of Broome was a huge success. Thanks to those who supported it. The proceeds enabled us to procure our first tea towels and T-shirts. We thank Rod Smith who may well be called the procurer. It seems likely we will have enough left over to buy a suitable freezer. This will be of great value with the "wet" season almost upon us.

After a difficult period, when nothing was happening and life became a little frustrating, it's good to be back on the rails. The value of this time lies in the knowledge that we have a lot of friends, not only in Perth, although this is where most of them are, but right across Australia. We are grateful for every supporter and every expression of support.

Broome itself is becoming aware that we exist. We are finding those who believe the Observatory has a place in the ongoing life of the area. The Shire has been very helpful; Lord McAlpine and his associates offer great assistance. The Chamber of Commerce is interested; Ansett W.A. through its local manager, have set up a wonderful raffle. (First prize will bring two people from any capital city in Australia to Broome and give them one week at Club Cable Beach). All this at peak wader departure time, March-April, to enable the winners to enjoy an epicurean feast of bird watching.

With the coming of the wet, birds abound. We can show you exciting species almost at the drop of a hat. The Dollarbirds are back and can be seen in the streets of Broome. Little Curlew, Varied Lorikeet and Banded Honeyeater can easily be seen within the town perimeters. There are 3 Cattle Egret at the sewage ponds, one in breeding plumage. Red-headed Honeyeaters, birds we had difficulty locating with consistency previously, have been seen at one site nine times in succession and seven times in the same tree.

It is a pity that more people do not come north during the "green" season when birding is at its best. In fairness however, we do point out that "early wet" and "heavy sweat" can become almost synonymous.

G. Hooper & B. Wells

## DR DOMINIC LOUIS SERVENTY

FIRST EDITOR OF W.A. BIRD NOTES: DECEASED  
8 AUGUST 1988

The inaugural meeting of the Western Australian Branch of the RAOU was held on 22 May 1943. Ten persons were present; among them Dr D.L. Serventy.

The report of the meeting reads that Dr Serventy "wished to avoid the profitless type of meeting so often found in natural history organisations. The meetings should have the serious aim of making... better ornithologists as well as providing an evening of entertainment. ... It was hoped to include a theoretical and practical topic at each meeting."

Dom Serventy actively participated in the early meetings of the W.A. Branch of the RAOU and the range of topics he introduced or contributed to is impressive. At the second meeting Dom Serventy led discussion of the importance of territory, then being recognised for the first time and on the identification of thornbills. At the next meeting he discussed bird display and the identification of beach-drifted petrels and in subsequent meetings contributed to the identification of albatrosses, the preparation of bird specimens, fauna boundaries, mortality of seabirds in Western Australia, bird social hierarchies, bird song, the resolution of differing interests in national parks, speciation of pardalotes, the pituitary gland and the breeding cycle, and the identification of ducks. In December 1944, Dom Serventy announced he was preparing a second edition of *Birds of the Swan River District* and at the fifteenth meeting in June 1947, he gave an account of the investigations he was then conducting on behalf of the CSIRO and the Tasmanian Fauna Board on the biology of the Short-tailed Shearwater. This CSIRO work developed into a major contribution to our knowledge of these birds.

In addition to his contributions Dom Serventy edited the early editions of Bird Notes, numbers 1 to 5 inclusive. The different conditions to these of today are illustrated by a report (July 1944) about Mr K.G. Buller presenting a collection of birds from the Canning Stock Route to the W.A. Museum. Mr Buller was included in a party reconditioning the wells along the Route between Wiluna and Halls Creek by being "given an official post with the party, that of pedal wireless operator and first-aid assistant. In his spare time he collected bird specimens and other natural history material, often under very trying conditions, the skinning being mostly done at night under the illumination of a carbide lamp."

It is also noticeable how many of the early meetings dealt with bird identification. Amid the large numbers of well photographed and illustrated bird books currently available and the ready accessibility of colour photographs and colour slides, it is difficult to grasp the difficulties of bird watching before these books and aids were available. It is clear the written word and personal interchange were the main means of passing on identification knowledge.

Throughout these early meetings, rarely attended by more than ten people, it is clear that Dom Serventy played a leading and significant role in setting a high standard of knowledge and breadth of observation, in motivating bird study and in making his knowledge available.

Dom Serventy's contribution to the establishment of the W.A. Group was significant and throughout his career he continued to give the Group encouragement.

## ENDANGERED AND VULNERABLE SPECIES PROJECT (EAVES)

The W.A. Group Conservation Sub-committee wishes to receive records of sightings or breeding records of those birds, which in Western Australia, south of Shark Bay, are or may be endangered and vulnerable. The Department of Conservation and Land Management is currently revising the list of birds to be gazetted as in need of special protection (and other fauna and flora) and it is hoped contributions to the endangered and vulnerable species (EAVES) project will be a contribution to the work of CALM and in turn the conservation of birds.

Please send to the RAOU Office (or telephone) the date and location of any observations as requested in the list of the birds.

Locations should be from (i.e. mentioned in) the Travellers Atlas of Western Australia, published by the Department of Lands and Surveys (available from them and many bookshops). Locations to be reported on are south of Shark Bay.

The birds to be covered by the EAVES project are:

Red-tailed Tropicbird  
Little Bittern  
Black Bittern  
Australasian Bittern  
Royal Spoonbill  
Freckled Duck  
Cape Barren Goose  
Square-tailed Kite - especially breeding records  
Black-breasted Buzzard" " "  
Peregrine Falcon " " "  
Grey Falcon  
Lewin's Rail  
Dusky Moorhen - outside of Perth Metro area  
Bush Thick-knee  
Painted Snipe  
Hooded Plover  
Eastern Curlew

Asiatic Dowitcher  
 Long-toed Stint  
 Roseate Tern  
 Little Tern  
 Fairy Tern  
 Lesser Noddy  
 Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo - breeding records only  
 White-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*baudinii baudinii*) long bills  
 - breeding records only  
 White-tailed Black-Cockatoo (*baudinii latirostris*) short  
 bills - breeding records only  
 Long-billed Corella  
 Pink Cockatoo  
 Alexandra's Parrot  
 Ground Parrot  
 Night Parrot  
 Blue Bonnet  
 Scarlet-chested Parrot  
 Barking Owl  
 Masked Owl  
 Eastern Grass Owl  
 Noisy Scrub-bird - other than Two Peoples Bay  
 Crested Shrike-tit  
 Western Whipbird  
 Nullarbor Quail-thrush  
 Red-winged Fairy-wren - north of Perth only  
 Thick-billed Grasswren  
 Western Bristlebird  
 Rufous Bristlebird  
 Slender-billed Thornbill  
 Grey Honeyeater  
 Red-eared Firetail

## AUSTRALIAN WADER STUDIES

### NEW PROJECT - RESIDENT WADER STUDY

The AWSG has instituted a new co-operative project: the Resident Wader Study. The objectives of the new project are:

- (a) to gather data on the breeding distribution, breeding seasonality and habitat requirements during breeding of resident waders,
- (b) to gather data with which to estimate the reproductive rates of resident waders and to identify the factors which may affect this,
- (c) to collect these data over as wide an area as possible,
- (d) to determine the relationship between breeding success, time of breeding and movements in the resident waders.

The resident waders are:

Comb-crested Jacana  
 Bush Thick-knee  
 Beach Thick-knee  
 Painted Snipe  
 Pied Oystercatcher  
 Sooty Oystercatcher  
 Masked Lapwing  
 Banded Lapwing  
 Red-kneed Dotterel  
 Hooded Plover  
 Red-capped Plover  
 Black-fronted Plover  
 Inland Dotterel  
 Black-winged Stilt  
 Banded Stilt  
 Red-necked Avocet  
 Australian Pratincole

Much of the information on breeding of these species is either anecdotal or from a small area over a short time. We hope that we can improve on this.

As co-ordinator of the project I would like to hear from you if you are interested in taking part in the project. Some data is already being collected through the RAOU Nest Record Scheme and the Australian Bird & Bat Banding Scheme, but even if you are already contributing through these schemes I would still like to hear from you. This will enable a Register of research on the resident waders to be built up. Regular reports will be published in *The Stilt*.

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**Blackmans Bay Tasmania 7150**

## PALLID CUCKOO PROJECT

J. Gentilli reported on the first appearance or call of the Pallid Cuckoo in the south-west of Western Australia in 1949. A further short report was also made in 1950. As a result of his work Gentilli (1950) proposed a number of conclusions.

Central to his hypothesis was the concept that the male Pallid Cuckoo called and commenced breeding activity in moist or wet weather. The 1949 report states "very few calls are recorded because the weather is too dry" and "it is only later in July that the eastern agricultural districts are wet enough to provide suitable conditions for the birds' activities". It also stated "in the south-west....there is no lag between the arrival of the Pallid Cuckoo and its first calling, because the arrival takes place....when moisture conditions are already favourable". Again "the exceptionally dry weather ... delayed the opening of the calling season" and "very late records ... show that the bird perhaps refrains from calling until adequate moisture for 'nesting' activities is available". (Gentilli, 1950)

Despite the assertion of a calling/breeding association with moist/wet conditions Gentilli (1950) also noted that the "particular dryness of June 1949 does not seem to have affected the calling of the bird" and he also was informed the Pallid Cuckoo had "whistled all through the drought year of 1914".

No hypothesis was advanced for the mechanism of association of moisture and calling/breeding activity, although an informant was quoted to the effect that "the birds frequent call generally foretells very wet weather. Whether it is because these caterpillars are very plentiful under such conditions, or that such weather pleases this bird" Gentilli could not determine. However, the same informant mentioned that the Pallid Cuckoo usually stays in the area (near Donnybrook) "all the spring even after the caterpillars have gone and does call then during fine weather".

The 1949 report mentions that Pallid Cuckoo calls are heard mainly in the south-west of Western Australia and that the bird tends to arrive at similar times each year.

Because of the association between moisture and calling/breeding and the pattern of information received on first calls, Gentilli (1950) concluded that the Pallid Cuckoo came from the north of the State into the south-west, moving down the west coast into the deep south-west and then, as moisture conditions improved further east, spread into the eastern parts of Western Australia.

In 1988 a similar project was undertaken. Members of the RAOU were requested at meetings to report their first sightings or hearing of the Pallid Cuckoo, other members were contacted through W.A. Bird Notes and a wider audience was reached through the medium of ABC Regional Radio. (Gentilli reached a wider public through a commercial station).



