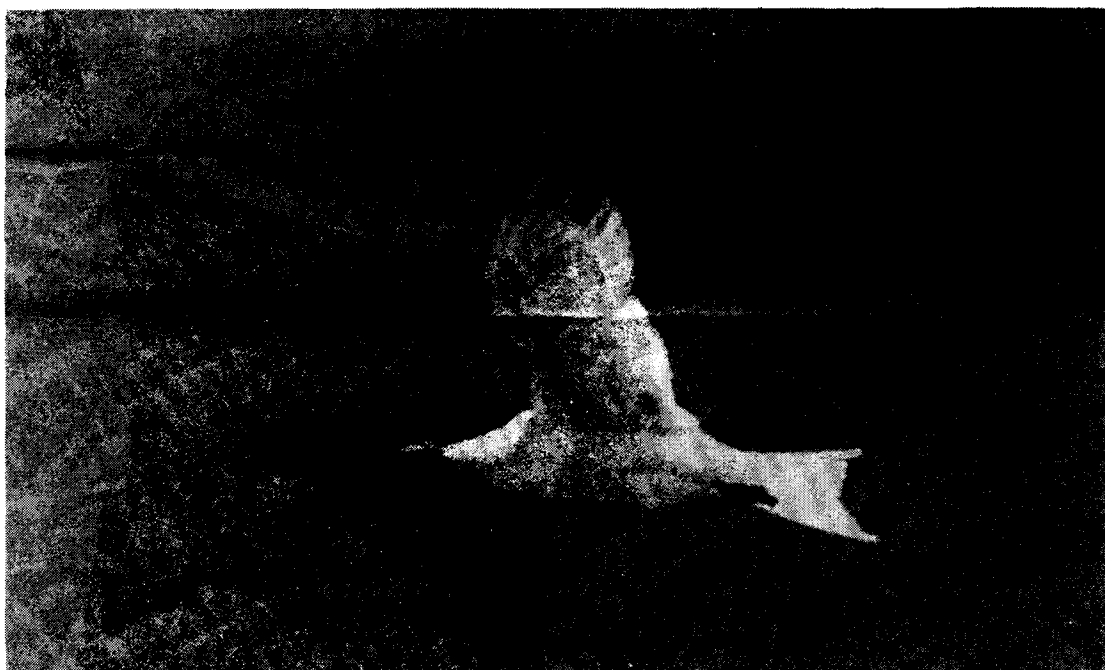


Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

Office	Room 218, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge 6153
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Chairman	Ros Denny, 55/38 King's Park Road, West Perth 6005 Telephone 321 5219
Secretary	Claire Mercer, PO Box 197, Tuart Hill 6060 Telephone 344 6367
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Birding Hotline	(09) 364 7349

GULL-BILLED TERNS BREEDING IN SOUTH-WEST WA



Gull-billed tern

Photo
Roger Jaensch

The good winter rains of 1988 saw excellent run-off from the mountains of the Stirling Range National Park, with lakes and swamps full.

Arriving at one of the Stirling Range unnamed salt lakes (4 km long) on 26 November 1988 to carry out the November waterfowl count, large numbers of Australian Shelduck, Banded Stilt and four Red-necked Avocet were sighted.

In addition, to my surprise, terns could be seen flying near the lake's edge.

While proceeding around the western side of the lake I focused my binoculars on an approaching tern. I consulted Slater's latest bird book and keyed it out to the Gull-billed Tern.

As I sat amongst the samphire to observe, with the mountains to the north silhouetted against a cloudy sky and water lapping at the lake's edge, two inquisitive emus approached to within 10 metres.

Gull-billed Terns were feeding near the lake's edge and flying over bushland (presumably feeding in farmland not far away) and then returning to alight on a small treeless island in the lake. I concluded they were possibly breeding, but as the sun was sinking I determined to return.

An opportunity arose two days later when Rodney Vervest and a friend John unexpectedly called in. We drove to the lake and waded the 800 metres to the island through thick mud which was covered by 300mm of water and contained large numbers of brine shrimp.

As we approached the island 350 Australian Shelduck arose before settling in the middle of the lake, and 30 metres from the island we disturbed Banded Stilt and 300 Curlew Sandpiper, a magnificent sight with the flash of white wings against the blue mountains of the Stirlings in the background. As we approached we could hear the Gull-billed Terns calling, a good indication that they were breeding.

The island at its eastern half had a covering of dry grasses with a few samphire bush; at the western end very small granite ridges (up to 200mm high) ran in an east-west direction. Between these ridges the nests were located.

Adult Gull-billed Terns continually swooped as we located six nests, three with two eggs and one with three eggs. Equally camouflaged were the three chicks from two nests. The chicks' defence was to take to the water. Three did so and three were rescued, with John walking 100 metres from the island to save one.

As we departed from the island the chicks could be seen re-arranging themselves to their correct nest as adults settled on eggs or chicks.

A total of 16 adult Gull-billed Terns were sighted.

A. Rose
Assistant National Park Ranger

The nests of the Gull-billed Terns were either shallow scrapes in the soil or in depressions in rock. Very little nest material was present and loosely about the nests. Nest material was seen being carried to the site by a Gull-billed Tern.

(Rodney Vervest)

We are indebted to Roger Jaensch for pointing out that the above is only the second report ever of Gull-billed Terns nesting in WA.

The first report, by Roger, is printed in Swans (now Landscape) Vol.13 No.3 October 1983, and describes a nest site at Lake Hinds, discovered by him of 21 nests. It is of interest that the nests differed. Those at Lake Hinds were bowls constructed of weeds and grass by contrast with the Stirling Range nests with

minimal material. In both cases the nests were on an island. Those works consulted give differing accounts of the nest. Beruldsen (1980) p.216 states, "a shallow hollow scratched in sand or earth, surrounded by whatever dry vegetation or flood debris is available in the immediate vicinity".

Pizzey (1980) p.143 writes "Nest: variable—a scrape in sand or soil to a well-made cup of dry twigs and feathers" and Hitchcock (1979) p.211 states "Scanty nest of dry plants". All three comment that nests are usually on an island as in both recorded W.A. cases.

(Ed)

References:

Beruldsen, G(1980) *A field guide to the nests and eggs of Australian birds*, Rigby Publishers Ltd, Australia.

Hitchcock, W(1979) in *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*, Readers Digest Services Ltd, NSW.

Pizzey, G and Doyle, R(1980) *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins, Sydney.

Slater, P(1986) *Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds*, Rigby Publishers, NSW.

Gull-billed tern nest with eggs

Photo
Roger Jaensch



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 November 1988 to January 1989.

Compiled by Roger Jaensch.

DOWN SOUTH

Great Crested Grebe - 2, 17/9/88, Guraga Lake - BBu, ABu * 1, 30/10/88, Forrestdale Lake - DJ: rare here * 25 and 4 nests with eggs, 27/11/88, in paperbarks and yates at mouth of

Jerdacuttup River - RJ

Darter - 1, on nest with tiny young, in yate tree, 6/12/88, Minvalara Lake (23 km WNW of Bremer Bay) - RV

Little Black Cormorant - colony of 50 pairs, in paperbarks and yates, 6/12/88, Minvalara Lake - RV * 200 pairs breeding at Hilliup Lake (11km ENE of Boxwood Hill), December 1988 - BBu, ABu * 4 and nest with young, 30/12/88, Gibb Road Swamp (Forrestdale area) - DJ

Pacific Heron - breeding recorded (number of breeding pairs in brackets) at the following localities: Hurstview Lake (near Guraga Lake), 17/9/88, (1) - BBu, ABu * North Bryde Swamp (near Bryde Lake), 21/11/88, (7) - RJ * Page - Giles Swamp (Magenta Lake dist.) 22/11/88, (1) - RJ * Coomalbidgup Swamp, 23/11/88, (1) - RJ * Fields - Griffith Swamp (46km W

of Scaddan), 24/11/88, (3) - RJ * Yaalup Lagoon (extensive flood), 5/12/88, (6) - RV, RJ * Gadara Swamp (20km W of Bremer Bay), 24/12/88 (1) - BBu, ABu. Most nests were in living flooded trees, one in a dead tree.

Great Egret - 27/11/88, flight paths of numerous adults, in full breeding colours suggested, active breeding colony of 30-50 pairs probably in existence in Culham Inlet - Jerdacuttup Lakes area - RJ * several nests still with chicks, late January 1989, South Perth Zoo - NH

Little Egret - 1, 9/12/88, Alfred Cove - PRH * 1, 3/1/89, Thomsons Lake - PMo, JH * 1, Herdsman Lake, 20/1/89 - MO

Rufous Night Heron - 250+, December 1988, Hilliup Lake - BBu, ABu

Little Bittern - 1, 5/11/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI * 1 at nest with small young, 26/12/88, Forrestdale Lake - DJ: in bulrush over water 0.55 m deep.

Australasian Bittern - 1, 24/11/88, calling in rushland at Mortup Lake (8km W of mouth of Thomas River) - RJ * 1 calling at Kogolup Lake, 1/12/88 - JH * 1 seen at Thomsons Lake, 14/1/89 - RAOU excursion.

Glossy Ibis - 4, 11/5/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI * 1, 26/11 - 31/12/88, Kogolup Lake - DJ, BF * 2, 19/1/89, Chandala Swamp - GA

Sacred Ibis - 4, possibly breeding at Hilliup Lake (Bremer district), December 1988 - BBu, ABu * reported breeding in yate swamp 25km W of Bremer Bay, November 1988 - MBI. These records represent a large (eastward) extension of breeding range for this species.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - breeding recorded (number of breeding pairs in brackets) at the following localities: Parnham's Lake (Bejoording), 22/11/88, (1) - JM, DM * Barrett-Lennard Lake (Beermullah district), 26/11/88, (1) - BBu, ABu * Jerdacuttup Lake, 27/11/88, (4) - RJ * Hilliup Lake, December 1988, (2) - BBu, ABu

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 8/1/89, Carine Lake - GS

Freckled Duck - 2, 20/11/88, Chittering Lake - BK: 2 males * 4 and a nest with 6 eggs, 26/11/88, Chandala Swamp - GA: new breeding locality * 53, 5/12/88, flooded thickets and paddock adjacent Yaalup Lagoon (25km NNE of Ongerup) - RJ, RV * 3, 1/1/89, Monger Lake - GS

Chestnut Teal - 26 males, plus females, and a clutch of large ducklings, 28/11/88, Old Jerramungup pool on Gairdner River - RJ

Australasian Shoveler - at nest, Nicholson-Oxley Swamp (SSW of Forrestdale Lake), 3/12/88 - DJ

Hardhead - 320, 17/6/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI * 60 and 5 clutches of young, 20/11/88, swamp at Forrest and Liddelow Roads (Banjup) - DJ, BF * 8 and nest with 12 eggs, in thicket, mouth of Jerdacuttup River, 27/11/88 - RJ

Blue-billed Duck - 250, 17/6/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI * 5 and clutch of young, 26/11/88, Chandala Swamp - GA: first record of breeding here.

Osprey - 2, 26/12/88, Alfred Cove - SHo

Square-tailed Kite - 2 at nest with near-fledged young, early January, northern Stirling Ranges - AR * 1, 27/11/88, Culham Inlet SW margin - RJ * 1, 11/1/89, near 25 Mile Rocks (N of Norseman) - RJ

Marsh Harrier - nest with small young, 14/10/88, Thomsons Lake - DMO

Peregrine Falcon - 1, 17/12/88; Punrak Road, Serpentine - DJ, BF * 1 pursuing Pacific Black Duck, Bodey's Swamp (Wannamal), 20/1/89 - BBu, ABu

Buff-banded Rail - 2 with young, Canning River at Riverton Bridge, 14/11/88 - DJ * adult with 3 young, 4/1/89, Island Point (Harvey Estuary) - BH, RD

Baillon's Crane - 3, 29/12/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI

Australian Crane - with young, Kalgoorlie and Boulder Sewage Ponds, 16/1/88, GSw

Spotless Crane - 2 with young, swamp between Wright Road and Warton Road (Forrestdale), 11/12/88 - DJ

Purple Swampphen - 1, 24/11/88, soakage swamp with rush, 28km NE of Esperance - RJ

Pied Oystercatcher - 34, 4/1/89, Pelican Point (Swan River) - MB

Lesser Golden Plover - 4, 4/12/88, Preston River mouth - RP

Hooded Plover - 6, 18/11/88, Preston Lake (south) - BBa et al * 103, 10/12/88, lake at Ned's Corner Road and highway (junction), E of Munglip - RJ * 1, 17/1/89, Alfred Cove - ND: immature bird * 1, 20/1/89, Bodey's Swamp (Wannamal) - BBu

Large Sand Plover - 2, 3-4/9/88, Rowles Lagoon (Credo Station) - GSw * 4, 13/11/88, Mandurah - BBa et al.

Inland Dotterel - 2 pairs, each with large young, 31/7/88, between Kookynie and Edjudina (Goldfields) - GSw

Banded Stilt - 8000, 20/11/88, Walyormouring Lake - MBr

Whimbrel - 2, 4/12/88, Preston River mouth - RP

Wood Sandpiper - 12, 17/1/88, King of West Lake (Kalgoorlie) - GSw * 3, 11/5/88, Thomsons Lake - PCI * 6, 25/11/88, Yanget Lake (near Indoon Lake) - BBu, ABu * 11, 26/12/88, swamp at Forrest and Liddelow Roads (Banjup) - JH * 25, 18/1/89, McLarty Lake - LHs * 72, 20/1/89, Vasse Estuary - RJ

Marsh Sandpiper - 2, Sept-Oct. 1988, Kalgoorlie and Boulder Sewage Ponds - GSw * 16, 27/12/88, McLarty Lake - GSw

Terek Sandpiper - 1, 13/11/88, Mandurah - BBa et al * 1, 4/12/88, Preston River mouth - RP

Gallinago Snipe - 1, 14/1/89, Kogolup Lake - RAOU excursion * 2, 29-31/1/89, Forrest-Tapper Swamp (Jandakot) - JH, RJ. These birds presumably Swinhoe's Snipe.

Black-tailed Godwit - 1, 18/1/88, Kalgoorlie Sewage Ponds - GSw

Pectoral Sandpiper - 7, 27/12/88, McLarty Lake - JH * 7, 20/1/89, Vasse Estuary - RJ

Long-toed Stint - 19, 20/1/89, Vasse Estuary - RJ

Oriental Pratincole - 1, 27/1/89, McLarty Lake - LHs

Silver Gull - 29/11/88, unfledged chick near South of Perth Yacht Club - HF

'black-headed' gull - 8/1/89, briefly seen at Monger Lake - GS

White-winged Tern - 110, 17/1/89, Yangebup Lake - RJ * 70, 20/1/89, Wonnerup Estuary - RJ

Fairy Tern - 100+, 2/12/88, several nests active, Boundary Island (Peel Inlet) - AD

Rainbow Lorikeet - 6, 9/12/88, Morley - RS

Regent Parrot - 25, 18/1/89, Kargotich Road (Mundijong) - PRH

Pallid Cuckoo and Fan-tailed Cuckoo - sub-adult of each species at Alfred Cove, 26/11/88 - BBa et al.

Black-eared Cuckoo - 13/8/88, Burra Rock (Goldfields) - GSw

Fork-tailed Swift - 19, 23/1/89, Point Moore Light-house (Geraldton) - PMa

Brown Songlark - immature at Alfred Cove, 5/1/89 - JH

Purple-gaped Honeyeater - nest with eggs, 15/1/89, Stirling Ranges NP - AR

Tawny-crowned Honeyeater - 2, 8/12/88, Anstey Road (Forrestdale) - DJ, BF

Red-browed Firetail - 7, 10/12/88, Kalamunda NP - DJ, BF
Chestnut-breasted Mannikin - 1, 15/11/88, Pelican Point (Swan River) - MB et al * 6 juveniles, 27/11/88, in bamboos near Bayswater Sanctuary - MB et al

Grey Butcherbird - nest with young, 17/11/88, Joondalup Lake South - GL * 1, 28/11/88, near Lake Florence (Windy Harbour road) - LHa: first record in this area?

Spotted Bowerbird - male with 2 females in bower, 31/7/88, Kookynie (Goldfields) - GSw

UP NORTH

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 45, 10/1/89, Koolan Island Rubbish Tip - LV, KC

Sarus Crane - 1, 18/1/89, Miaree Pool (Maitland River): presumably same bird as photographed there by I. Tanner in Feb. 1988 (Aust. Bird Watcher 12, 269-270) - KC

White-winged Tern - many thousands, hawking for insects over spinifex plains, 17/1/89, 40km N of Port Hedland - KC

Channel-billed Cuckoo - 2, 14/1/89, El Questro Station - KC

Ground Cuckoo-shrike - 2, 11/1/90, 60km E of Fitzroy Crossing - KC

KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

ABu - Anne Buchanan	ND - Norma Duff
AD - Austin Daw	NH - Neil Hamilton
AR - Allan Rose	PCl - Pauline Clay
BBa - Bryan Barrett	PMa - Peter Mack
BBu - Bruce Buchanan	PMo - Paul Mollatt
BF - Bryony Fremlin	PRH - Peel Howden
BHa - Barbara Hale	RD - Ros Denny
BK - Brad Kneebone	RJ - Roger Jaensch
DJ - David James	RP - Ross Payton
DM - Doug Morgan	RS - Ray Schulz
DMo - David Morecombe	RV - Rodney Vervest
GA - George Agar	SHo - S. Haughton
GL - Graham Little	
GS - Geoff Shannon	
GSw - George Swann	
HF - Hazel Fermaner	
JH - Jack Hunt	
JM - Jim Masters	
KC - Kevin Coate	
LHa - Leslie Harrison	
LHs - Les Harris	
LV - Lee Vernon	
MB - Max Bailey	
MBI - Mark Blewett	
MBr - Mary Bremner	
MO - Margaret Owen	

COMMITTEE 1989

CHAIRMAN	R Denny
VICE CHAIRMAN	To be notified
SECRETARY	C Mercer
TREASURER	B Hale
COMMITTEE MEMBERS	B Buchanan
	D Kingston (co-opted)
	C Napier
	R Smith
	C Wilder (co-opted)
	B Wilson

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

1989 DUNE STABILIZATION WORKPARTY

Every visit to Eyre presents a change of some significance in the dunes; the track is covered or scoured deeper, ridges appear, and trees disappear while others re-emerge. Tree-filled, moss-carpeted gullies which shelter beneath huge white walls are steadily engulfed by those same walls of sand which offered protection.

This year's surprise is the lush growth, now twelve months old, on the previous workparty's half acre site. Due to the lack of nets, seaweed was used to stabilize most of the planting and that seems to be the cause of the enthusiastic growth of euphorbia and spinifex. Unfortunately, little stability was obvious beyond the worked area. At the northern side erosion up to two metres deep had occurred, indicating that many tonnes of sand had moved, probably northwards. An earlier worksite, which is now two years old, is predominantly mounds of arctotheca which have grown above the netted level by capturing sand. It continues to attract Pink Cockatoos, which thrive on its yellow flowers.

Our aim this year was to stabilize the area adjacent to the previous work and extend it to areas of natural stability. Making the task easier was the large number of big nets. That factor allowed a doubling of the area covered and now a site of about three acres is stabilized in that vicinity, though the track running through may continue to cause problems. Seaweed was also used in areas where the large nets were impractical, but its availability was not assured. Weed-covered beaches were often swept clean by the following day. During the fortnight we had five people available for dunework on most days and though we had our share of unkind conditions there was plenty of time available to make workers weary. Ian and Arvi ferried their sandy guests about to Twilight Cove and other spots (when they weren't collecting weed) and generally kept us cheerful. Twilight Cove was particularly fruitful. It netted (so to speak) 14 beach-washed specimens comprising seven petrels (White-headed and Great-winged), five shearwaters, a Fairy Penguin and a tiny Loggerhead Turtle. An Arctic Skua pestered a tern for its meal and an Australasian Gannet dived repeatedly for its own. At the shore seals and dolphins made appearances. One large bull seal took some interest in the swimmers of our party then slid away through the water with efficient and graceful haste.

On those warm dry days when the air is misty with wind-borne sand and the dune peaks are smoking, it is comforting to think that perhaps in the future such conditions may improve. There's much to be done and much which cannot ever be completed, but the many years of effort have obviously reduced dune movement in the vicinity of the Observatory.

R. Smith

FOR RENT

Weekender, South Yunderup. 200m. to Murray River and 5min. drive to Peel Inlet birding spots. Sleeps 6-8.
 Ring (09) 381 9035 weekdays.

ENDANGERED AND VULNERABLE SPECIES PROJECT (EAVES)

The following list of birds are or may be endangered or vulnerable in the South-West south of Shark Bay.

Please send to the RAOU Office (or telephone) the date and location of any observations of the birds on the list. Locations should be related to locations mentioned in the Travellers Atlas of W.A. (a Lands and Surveys publication).

Birds covered by the EAVES survey 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 - especially breeding records
 Peregrine Falcon - especially breeding records
 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

PALLID CUCKOO PROJECT

In W.A. Bird Notes No.48 November 1988 I commented on the absence of sightings north of the Swan River.

Since then a number of observations have been reported to me in the Perth metropolitan area for 1988 but none north of the Swan River. Some observers commented on their failure to report on the basis that they expected others to do so.

Birding Sites Around Perth (R. Van Delft (1988) UWA Press, W.A. reports Pallid Cuckoos throughout the metropolitan area in 1985, so it may be that the absence of reports north of the Swan River was more an absence of observers/reports than absence of Pallid Cuckoo. However, it may not be without significance that Van Delft (1988) gives the greatest prominence to Pallid Cuckoo in Whiteman Park in West Swan, in a general area hardly typical of the metropolitan region.

B. Buchanan

NOTICES

BIRD BANDING FIELD TRIPS

CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology is studying avian populations in remnants of vegetation in the wheat-belt of Western Australia. Dr. Denis Saunders is in charge of the research programme while Perry de Rebeira is the Senior Technical Officer running the bird banding project within the major programme.

Qualified banders, trainees or interested birdos visiting, or resident in, Western Australia are invited to join Perry on banding trips to the study site near Kellerberrin.

1989 field trip dates are 20 - 24 March
 17 - 21 April
 17 - 21 July
 23 - 27 October
 20 - 24 November

Accommodation on field trips is provided free of charge and food costs can be shared - usually \$6-\$8 per day. Free short-term accommodation can also be provided immediately before and after field trips.

Enquiries can be directed to: Dr. Denis Saunders, CSIRO, LB 4, P.O. Midland 6056, Western Australia.

EXPEDITION TO BAND HONEYEATERS IN THE SOUTHERN NULLARBOR, JANUARY 1990

Volunteers are required to man temporary bird banding stations at Israelite Bay, Toolina Cove, Baxter's Memorial Cave, Twilight Cove, Eyre Bird Observatory, Mundrabilla and Eucla for part or all of 3-31 January 1990. The expedition aims to document large-scale movements of honeyeaters and Silvereyes through the coastal mallee belt of southern coastal Western Australia. The only qualification required is an interest in birds.

Experienced and licenced bird banders who would like to be in charge of one of the banding stations, those banders who do not want the responsibility of co-ordinating activities of others but would like to take part in the project, those who wish to learn the disciplines of mist-netting and bird banding, and bird watchers who are happy to count honeyeaters that fly over banding stations are encouraged to volunteer.

This is a great opportunity to see a broad range of bird species which inhabit the arid and semi-arid zones of Australia.

FULL DETAILS IN MARCH EDITION OF NATIONAL RAOU NEWSLETTER.

Information can also be obtained from:

Dr Stephen Ambrose
Department of Zoology
The Australian National
University
GPO Box 4
Canberra ACT 2601
Phone: (062)49 3030(W)
(062)82 1262(H)

Mr Perry de Rebeira,
CSIRO
Division of Wildlife and
Ecology
Locked Bag No 4
Midland WA 6056
Phone: (09)252 0111(W)
(09)298 8999(H)

EYES OPEN FOR STARLINGS

Starlings have continued their attempts to establish in W.A., especially along the south coast.

Two major groups were discovered in 1988 at Many Peaks and Bremer Bay.

Twenty-two birds were killed by the Agricultural Protection Board at Many Peaks and they believe this colony has been eliminated.

By mid-December approximately 100 birds had been destroyed at Bremer Bay, including many juveniles. Nests were located in hollows in Yate timbered swamps.

The birds are not conspicuous when breeding, flying back into swamps at tree-top level in small groups or singly.

The most noticeable features which may assist in identification are:

- (a) Strong flight and shiny black appearance, especially when in good light.
- (b) Manoeuvring in unison when flying in flocks.
- (c) Associates with livestock when feeding, sometimes sitting on the back of sheep.

Please report any sightings to your nearest A.P.B. Office as soon as possible.

T.E. Bush

OPEN SEASON AUSTRALIAN SHELDUCK

The Government Gazette W.A. of 20 January 1989 contains a declaration of an Open Season in respect of Australian Shelduck only for the whole of 1989 for the South-West and Eucla Land Divisions.

This declaration is subject to conditions:

- Australian Shelduck may only be taken by landholders or leaseholders (or their nominated agents) on land they own or occupy which is used for primary production and on which the ducks are the cause of damage to primary production and water storage.
- Any Australian Shelduck shot may not be received or disposed of for commercial purposes.
- All Australian Shelduck taken and in possession must have at least one fully feathered wing attached until the duck is prepared for immediate cooking and is taken to the residence of its owner.
- Wildlife Officers may prohibit the taking of Australian Shelduck until a landholder obtains a Damage Licence.

HEPBURN WOODLANDS PRESERVATION GROUP

Our group has reason to believe that a Peregrine Falcon may be resident in the area of the Hepburn Heights bushland. Apparently this bird is classified as being in need of special protection by the E.P.A. Act. In order to provide this protection we first need to have it verified that the bird is nesting in the area. I appeal to your members through your March Newsletter for any information re sightings, etc. I can be contacted at any time on the phone number below by your members.

We are endeavouring to preserve the woodland at Hepburn Heights from housing development.

Mrs. Norma Rundle
76 Macleay Drive
PADBURY WA 6025
Phone: 307-4409

Note: Hepburn Heights is north of Hepburn Avenue bounded by the Mitchell Freeway and Padbury/Craigie housing development.

(Ed)

GUIDES FOR VISITING BIRDOS

From time to time the RAOU Office receives calls from or hears of Birdos from interstate or overseas who are in Perth and are anxious to see some of our local sites.

It would be very useful to have a list of names in the Office to which we can refer when such calls come.

If you would like to join this list, would you please telephone the Office and volunteer your services.

BIRDING HOTLINE

The Birding Hotline was established in May 1987. Its main purpose was to report interesting sightings to allow people to rush out and see the (usually) rarer species which they might not normally have opportunity to see.

It was thus also a way of meeting other interested birdwatchers and of encouraging people to keep an eye out for and report anything of interest. It also reported to members and visitors the best birding spots at the moment, forthcoming excursions, meetings, etc.

However, fewer and fewer sightings have been reported and it is felt that it may no longer be justified in keeping the Hotline operating.

If you have any suggestions on how the Hotline can be more successful please contact Ian Standing on: 344.3651(H).

RAFFLE

Results of the Raffle held in aid of the Broome Bird Observatory are:

1st Prize	
Ticket No 0677	Tracey & Clive Fraser-Swatton 2 Oorin Road, Hornsby Heights NSW
2nd Prize	
Ticket No 1328	Jacqueline Bernard 297 Vincent Street, Leederville

The organisers would like to thank all those who participated in the Raffle.

Approximately \$5,000 was raised which has helped to purchase a Toyota Landcruiser for the Observatory.

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

CHRISTMAS AT BROOME

For a bird-lover, what could be more enjoyable than spending a week of solid birding in the "Green Season" at Broome Bird Observatory in the company of two expert birdos, namely Gail Hooper and Brice Wells. Add to that recipe, Christmas and all its adjunct niceties, stir the whole and perhaps you will be able to understand some of our enjoyment.

The previous week we had helped Brice drive the Observatory's newly-acquired Toyota Personnel Carrier from Perth, spending two and a half days on the road. In so doing we crossed the Ashburton River which was a raging torrent after the recent cyclone and while snatching a hasty lunch on its banks we saw the Pilbara form of the Spinifex Pigeon (*ferruginea*).

Some of the highlights of our stay included two visits to Roebuck Plains Station (a mere 1,000,000 acres). The first was to Lake Eda. When the lake is full at the end of the Wet it covers a vast area and is home for thousands of waterfowl. On our visit we could only find several deep ponds in the centre of the area. Even so, we were able to count over 400 Plumed Whistling Duck and some 45 Wandering Whistling Duck, as well as several species of waders. The most exciting was a Gallinago Snipe which rose and settled three times in front of us. There were also several pairs of nesting Masked Lapwing—we found one nest containing four eggs. While we were walking back to the car 12 Australian Bustard flew overhead to alight on the grassland near to a small group of Brolga. During our coffee break in the surrounding bush, Brush and Black-eared Cuckoos called and a Jacky Winter announced his presence from a tree-top.

On our second trip to Roebuck Plains we visited Gurrumbul Bore seeing waders and various ducks on many of the wet areas caused by the recent rains. Oriental Plover and Little Curlew were both new to us. At the bore itself we found Dollarbirds and a colony of Rufous Night Heron. On the way home we found a party of Yellow Wagtail which to our mutual surprise were perching in low trees (of all the hundreds of wagtails seen in the UK none have shown preference for trees). There were also 20 or more Barn Swallows flying in company with Tree Martins. On Christmas morning we walked with Brice to again locate the Yellow Wagtails—they were still using trees as well as catching insects on the ground.

During the morning we saw and heard four species of cuckoo—the Brush, Pallid and Black-eared—and heard Horsfield's in the distance. We also found the Rufous form (*megarhyncha*) of Little Shrike-thrush many kilometres south of its supposed territory—Gail and Brice had already seen one at their bird-bath at the Observatory.

After a traditional Christmas lunch and the obligatory post-lunch nap, we went for a walk to wear off some of the extra kilos acquired from Gail's hospitality. They took us through the local patch of mangroves where we had hoped to find Red-headed Honeyeaters which were known to inhabit the area, but not so. However, we did find the Grey (*phasiana*) and Northern Fantail, Yellow White-eyes and Dusky Warbler. Slithering out of the mud, Gail nonchalantly pointed out a superb male Red-backed Wren which we were able to watch for several minutes.

Another morning was spent walking round the sewage ponds in Broome, always a haven for waders. While there we found a Lesser Golden Plover among eleven other species of waders, duck and ibis. Overhead a Brown Goshawk attacked an Osprey and snatched a feather from its tail!

On yet another morning after rain we all walked through Hidden Valley, an area of botanical importance behind the dunes. This is another haven for birds where Brice showed us a Great Bowerbird's bower and also found its nest which contained an addled egg. A pair of Red-winged Parrot sat in the sunlight on a bare tree for several minutes giving the photographer in the party the chance for a good shot. There were Red-backed Wren and Golden-headed Cisticola among the low scrub-grass and parties of Grey-crowned Babbler scurried away as we approached.

Our last walk was through the main thickets of mangroves along Crab Creek which has to be crossed—its banks consist of knee-deep, liquid grey mud through which one has to wade, but the results are well worth the effort. We found both the Mangrove Golden and White-breasted Whistlers and their hens, together with other mangrove birds. Brice also showed us a Brahminy Kite's nest from which the young had flown.

All this and more, but without doubt the greatest and for us the most thrilling sight was to stand on the low cliffs overlooking Roebuck Bay at high tide and see thousands upon thousands of packed waders awaiting the turn of the tide so that they could get back to their feeding grounds on the sandbanks. In places the red beach appeared to have turned grey. We stood and marvelled as over a thousand Black-tailed Godwit sprang into the air as did hundreds of other waders when a pair of Brahminy Kite flew the length of the beach.

During the seven days we spent at the Observatory we saw 132 species of which 11 were new to us. Gail and Brice took us into six different types of habitat. We ate and talked 'birds' and walked and saw 'birds'—we shall remember this Christmas for a very long time.

B. Barrett and M. Clegg

MELANIC TENDENCIES OF WHITE-WINGED FAIRY-WREN

On previous visits to Kalbarri I had become certain that I had observed the White-winged Fairy-wren with a definite tendency towards melanic plumage. I needed confirmation that my observations were not subjective, so on a visit to the particular site which I knew, in September 1988, I had the company of three other observers.

There is low scrub between the Red Bluff Caravan Park and Wittecarra Gully. It was in this low dune area 50-60 metres from the ocean that we walked in mid-afternoon. Previous experience had proved that small flocks of wrens live in this location and we soon found a flock.

One particular individual took my eye, so I approached it carefully, using my 7x50s to be certain that it was a male White-winged Fairy-wren. To the naked eye, from 15 metres or so, it appeared almost a black and white bird. There was just a hint of bluishness towards the lower parts. This was confirmed several times with good quality binoculars (Pentax) To be absolutely sure, I moved 180 degrees around the perching position, in case the light was playing tricks. It was then that I was positive that the wren was almost completely black. Certainly there was a bluish cast on the underside, but my other three observers, all with binoculars and from various viewing angles, confirmed the sighting. This is now the third time that I have observed this phenomena at this location.

I would welcome other sightings in this locality as it is easy enough to verify if one is to visit Kalbarri.

R.H. Smith

Blakers et al (1984) note that "birds in dark plumage have also been observed on the mainland" (p.441) and Storr (1985) also states (p.51) "males from far west of range tend to be darker than typical".

(Ed)

REFERENCES

Blakers M, Davies S J J F, Reilly P N (1984), *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, Melbourne University Press.

Storr, G M (1985), *Birds of the Gascoyne Region, Western Australia*, W.A. Museum, Perth.

RUFIOUS NIGHT HERON AND BLUE-BILLED DUCK

Wading in swamps has several advantages. It gives atavistic pleasure, brings one closer to the environment, avoids the Tiger Snake habitat of the foreshore, cools in summer and adds a spice of hazard. One of the greatest advantages however is the ability to move silently when the water is above mid thigh. This silent progress, coupled with the difficulty birds appear to have in determining whether a half submerged human is a threat or a strange new species, allows wading to bring its exponents closer to waterbirds without alarm than is usually possible. Two recent (December 1988) experiences exemplify this.

Wading waist deep in Gnombup Swamp (Bremer Bay) I approached a fallen tree which had much of its trunk and branches above water level. When about five metres away I became conscious of a large yellow eye gazing at me from the fallen tree trunk. This gradually turned into an immature Rufous Night Heron as it walked up the tree trunk to the highest point to survey the intruder. Despite much fumbling with binoculars and gesticulation to Anne who was following (and like me actually looking for nesting Darter) the Rufous Night Heron remained unaffected.

We were standing still to observe when, after a minute of careful examination of us, the Rufous Night Heron walked slowly down the trunk which led towards us until it reached the water's edge only some three metres away. After a while I decided I wanted to continue my progress and I spoke both to the bird and to Anne but without any apparent alarm in the Rufous Night Heron. Continuing past the tree trunk, silently as before, the bird walked slowly along the trunk keeping pace with us until we had passed, all the while only some three metres away.

Two days later again wading deep at Toocalup Swamp among Yate trees Anne and I saw a male and female Blue-billed Duck with four ducklings and were pleased with our first sighting of Blue-billed Ducklings. It was not until returning to Perth that I appreciated the unusual nature of the sighting. Frith (1967) comments that J Wheeler, (who watched Blue-billed Ducks for ten years and published his findings in *Emu* in 1953), "has observed one brood accompanied by both male and female" (page 304), while Frith had never observed this.

A little further into the swamp a male and female Blue-billed Duck came into a small patch of open water about five metres in front. They, like the Rufous Night Heron stopped to look. After a few moments, the male, I was delighted to hear, made a noise described in Gould (1865) as "it has no voice but makes a noise with its heart" (page 379 Vol 2), a description again quoted (page 154) by Serventy and Whittell (1976) and which seems to express it rather well. Soon after the male bird began raising and lowering its head and body in a bobbing motion, rather as though to "wash" but without going sufficiently into the water. During this action the female bird slowly "drifted" away. When the female was disappearing between the trees the male abruptly dived and was not seen again.



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Continuing a little further we saw two male Blue-billed Ducks moving swiftly about with much splashing and water commotion. They went to and fro passing each other, one behind the other and in opposite directions, all the time creating noise and attracting attention. After some fifteen seconds or so I noticed a female Blue-billed Duck making off in the distance (apparently without young) together with some Pink-eared Ducks and ducklings. As suddenly as the first Blue-billed Duck had dived, so these two did the same, surfacing some distance away and going further away strongly.

Frith (1977) says female Blue-billed Ducks are often deserted by males after nest building. The presence of females in the immediate area suggests a possibility that the unusual behaviour was intended as a distraction to allow the females to depart unnoticed.

As Blue-billed Ducks can lay in December (and as the swamp was favourable with a ten or twenty year high water) it is possible the males were assisting with nest building and their behaviour to the unusual half submerged visitors was an instinctive distraction activity. Unfortunately I have not been able to find any account of distraction among Blue-billed Ducks (or indeed any ducks) so the strange behaviour, if distraction, requires confirmation.

B. Buchanan

REFERENCES

Frith, H J (1977) *Waterfowl in Australia*, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Sydney

Gould, J (1865) *Handbook to the Birds of Australia*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne

Serventy, D & Whittell (1976) *The Birds of Western Australia*, UWA Press, Perth

GREAT-CRESTED GREBE IN SOUTH-EASTERN INTERIOR

An exhausted Great-crested Grebe was collected by a passing motorist between Mundrabilla and Eucla yesterday (on the Eyre Highway). Mr Alan Handy, A.P.B. Inspector, Eucla, identified the bird by its flipper-like feet and the tufts on its head. The grebe was placed in the Eucla settlement pond for recuperation. On 17 January Mr Handy was rewarded with a peck on the hand when he checked on the grebe. The bird seemed to be well on the way to recovery as it jumped into the pond and completed a successful dive. However, three days later the Great-crested Grebe was found dead.

Mr Handy reported there had been strong westerly winds over the previous few days.

A. Handy per P. Coyle
Agriculture Protection Board

ALBINO AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE

On the 6th November at approximately 8.30 am while heading south on the Old Mandurah Road, between Safety Bay Road and Dixon Road in the Cooloonup Lake area, my brother and I observed a white Australian Magpie with a small group of five other magpies. By the time we slowed down and turned around the magpies had flown into trees.

When the white Australian Magpie was flying up to the tree I saw the undertail coverts and vent area were dark brown. The edges of the wings from the shoulder right around to the primaries were edged with brown and the beak was a creamy colour. The base of the beak to the eye was brown and the body was all white with loam dust wash over it.

While I observed the white bird it displayed similar characteristics to Australian Magpies such as its flight pattern and when it alighted on a tree branch, it wiped its beak from side to side on a small branch. Before I could observe further all the Australian Magpies flew off towards the west. I did not have time to note the colour of its legs. It was a fully grown bird. I hope other birdwatchers are lucky enough to observe the bird.

G.D. Houston

POSSIBLE GARGANEY SIGHTING AT HOUTMAN ABROLHOS

Mary Bremner reports seeing ten possible Garganey on a lagoon on Wooded Island of the Easter Group of the Houtman Abrolhos on 11 December 1988.

Confirmation was not possible because of distance and the fact the birds did not fly. If confirmed, this would be the most southerly sighting of Garganey in W.A.

Ed.

EXCURSION REPORTS

TWELVE HOUR TWITCHATHON - 26 November 1988

Only five teams entered the 1988 challenge bird count probably because of a clash of dates with the annual waterbird count. The team of David James, Bryony Fremlin, John and Helen Start again beat the team of John Hansen and Peel Howden by one species (112 to 111 in 1987, 116 to 115 in 1988!).

Some preferred the BBQ in King's Park after the event and certainly it was very pleasant and relaxed and surprisingly, not crowded. Others preferred the format in 1987 where we had a cheap meal at a food market after the event as it avoided the need to keep food with them all day in the hot weather.

I. Standing

FLYNN ROAD, THE LAKES

The first time we walked in the Wandoo woodlands of Flynn Road was 1 June, 1985. At the time Brice Wells and I thought the area was worth watching to study its avifauna. This area lies on the south side of the head-waters of the Helena River and covers quite a considerable area. Since our first walk we have visited the area 21 times. We have recorded a total of 61 species of which 21 are known to breed within the woodlands.

On a bright sunny Sunday morning in December, 20 or more birdos met at 7 am to explore the area. The expected attractions were nesting Hooded Robin, Elegant Parrot and the possible sighting of Crested Shrike-tit. We drove to our study area and suggested everyone went wherever they wished. The organisers had some qualms as they themselves failed to locate the attractions. However, the Hooded Robins relented and displayed in front of most of the group, bringing their young with them. Some even saw one or two Crested Shrike-tit. Elegant Parrots fed their young in the trees overhead, as did several other species, whilst a flight of Purple-crowned Lorikeet sped past over the top of the forest.

During the morning 39 species were seen and a new bird added to the list: a pair of Little Wattlebirds feeding an immature. A Rainbow Bee-eater nesting hole was located - a new breeding record for the area.

B. Barrett

THOMSONS LAKE

An unusually cool, cloudy day for January greeted those who visited Thomsons Lake. Walking around the edge of the lake the sight of numerous bush birds made a pleasant start to the day.

The unusually high water level made access difficult. Those who ignored the uncomfortable conditions were rewarded with good views of a Baillon's Crake. A fleeting glimpse of an Australasian Bittern was the reward for a few lucky wetbirders.

A wide range of duck species were present, but numbers were low. Whiskered Terns were in abundance. Altogether 49 species were seen for the day.

The few who carried on to Kogolup Lake after lunch were more than happy with excellent close views of a Snipe Gallinago sp.

J. Hunt

PUBLICATIONS

YOU CAN BUY THE FOLLOWING ITEMS at the RAOU Office, , Room 218, first floor, 15 Ogilvie Rd, Canning Bridge 6153, W.A. Don't forget to add the cost of postage and packing if you are not calling to pick up purchases. Items are usually available for purchase at RAOU meetings and excursions.

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

- The Atlas of Australian Birds \$49
(produced by the RAOU: shows distribution of bird species)
- overlays for the Atlas \$6
- Methods for Censusing Birds in Australia-1982 \$5
(produced by the WA Group, RAOU)
- Report of the Middlesex Study Centre \$5
- WA Bird Report 1982 \$5
- A Pocket List of Australian Birds 70c
(a handy checklist; produced by Canberra Ornithologists Group)
- RAOU check list of Birds of WA \$1 for 10
- A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia by G. Pizzey (1985 reprint, paperback; small format)
Postage in Zone 15 \$2.60 plus 40c envelope \$19
- The Birds of Australia, by Simpson & Day \$30
(1984, large format; text and plate facing each other) Postage in Zone 15 \$2.60 plus 55c envelope
- Every Australian Bird Illustrated \$22
(large format; 563 colour photos)
- In Quest of Bower Birds by N. Chaffer \$26
(large format; text and photographs of all species)
- A Field Guide to the Birds of WA \$15
by Storr & Johstone
(WA Museum 1985 edition; solely birds of WA)
- The Birdlife of Rottnest Island by Saunders and de Rebeira \$8
(1985; text; colour plates; maps)
- Eyre Bird Observatory: Report 1981-83 \$5
- RAOU Calendar 1989 \$10
- Bird-call tapes \$11
(3 choices; mostly WA birds; announced version)
- Western Australian Bird Notes \$2 per issue
- New Colour Guide to Hong Kong Birds by Viney & Phillips \$13
- Shorebirds, by Hayman, Marchant & Prater \$49
- The Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds \$28
- The Great Australian Birdfinder \$55
by Michael Morecombe
- Shorebirds in Australia, Brett Lane (Postage in Zone 15 \$2.60 plus 55c envelope) \$45
- Birdlife of Murdoch, ed. B.D. Porter \$6
- Birds of Australia Logbook, Simpson & Day \$11
- The Shorebirds of Australia, Nat. Photo Index \$60
- The Seabirds of Australia, Nat. Photo Index \$55
- A Birders Guide to Japan, J.W. Robinson \$25
- Birding Sites Around Perth, Ron Van Delft \$10
- Where to Find Birds in Australia, by John Bransbury \$30

- A Guide to the Flora and Fauna of the Rockingham Offshore Islands and Cape Peron W.A. Naturalists' Club (KRMB) \$10

If you have suggestions for titles that we could obtain, please give details to the WA Office. Please bear in mind that the W A Group is reluctant to spend money on bird books that do not sell readily.

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

Other Items for Sale

RAOU Emu badges	\$3
RAOU ties (Navy blue or maroon)	\$15
Rottnest badges	\$2
Cards, packs of 8	\$6
Key rings in box	\$4
unboxed	\$3.50
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How to Attract Birds to a W.A. Garden	50c
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Videos for hire from RAOU office

- The Language of Birds
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- The Petersfinger Cuckoos
- Kingdom of The Lyrebird
- The Secret Reeds
- COST \$5 each plus postage

ADVICE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Editor requests contributors to note the following

- copy concerning W.A. birds may be published; sightings etc in respect of birds outside W.A. will not normally be included.
- write legibly or type, DOUBLE SPACED.
- use RAOU recommended English names for W.A. birds - a list is available at the W.A. RAOU Office.
- copy will be edited where considered appropriate.

DEADLINE FOR JUNE 1989 ISSUE IS 22 APRIL

COMING EVENTS

March

No monthly excursion. Please take part in the Annual Waterfowl Counts, March 1989 edition.

Monday 20 March

Meeting

(NB - FORMERLY 27 MARCH.)

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

Rogan Draper will talk about the birds around Darwin.

Monday 20 March - Friday 24 March

Bird Banding Field Trip

See Notices for detail.

Sunday 9 April

Excursion

Beeliar chain of wetlands

Meet at 8 am on the western side of Bibra Lake at the northern (brick paved) carpark off Progress Drive, Bibra Lake.

Ron will talk about the Beeliar Regional Park which was proposed by the Wetlands Conservation Society.

Leader: Ron Van Delft

Monday 17 April - Friday 21 April

Bird Banding Field Trip

See Notices for detail.

Monday 24 April

Meeting

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

To be advised.

Saturday 13 - Sunday 14 May

Campout

Capel and its environs

Capel is on the Bussell Highway about 209km south of Perth and 27km south of Bunbury.

Mandy Bamford has been working in Capel on the rehabilitation of an area as habitat for waterbirds following sand mining (see WABN March 1988). Activities during the weekend could include planting rushes or trees, banding waterbirds and visiting the ibis colony (although the birds won't be breeding in May). Bring spade, garden trowel or similar, and wellingtons/waders.

Others may prefer a more leisurely weekend of birdwatching. The Vasse and Wonerup Estuaries and the Ludlow National Park (Tuart State Forest) are in the region.

For camping be fully self-sufficient although water will be available. Plenty of tent space at the Bamford's property but only limited floor space inside.

For those wanting to arrive Friday night please contact Mandy Bamford (097 - 272 675) or Ian Standring (344 3651 home) for map/directions to find the Bamfords' property.

Otherwise, meet 10.30 am Saturday 13th at the Capel Tavern which is immediately on the left after crossing the bridge in Capel.

Monday 29 May

Meeting

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

To be advised.

Sunday 18 June

Excursion

Muchea/Gingin area

Meet in Muchea at 8.30 am about 55km north of Perth. From Perth take the Great Northern Highway. About 11km north of Bullsbrook watch for, and take, the Brand Highway turn off to the left. Muchea is about 2km past this turn-off. After crossing the railway line immediately before Muchea, take the second road left and park your car.

Sturdy footwear and/or wellingtons recommended for bush and/or waterbirds.

Leader: Ron Van Delft

Monday 26 June

Meeting

Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8 pm

To be advised.