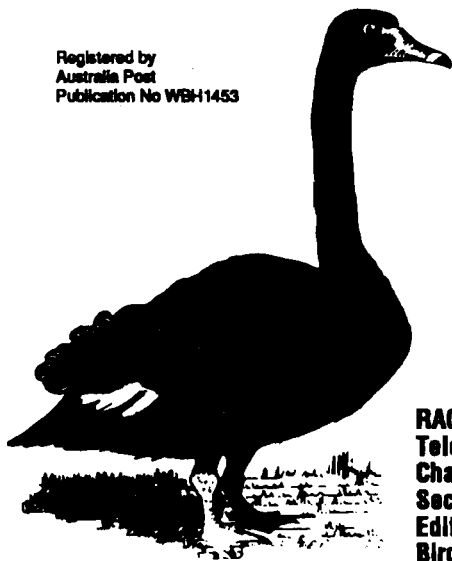


# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union



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## MARSH HARRIER SEIZES COOT

The following took place on 28 May 1990 at Lake Yangebup. At 2.30pm a group of about 15 Eurasian Coots which were feeding at the water's edge moved rapidly into deeper water. I have noticed this often heralds the passage of a Marsh Harrier "cruising" at a height between 5 and 7 metres just offshore. On this occasion the Marsh Harrier appeared before the Eurasian Coots had reached deeper water. The Marsh Harrier turned and stooped, striking one of the hindmost of the Eurasian Coot without great force. The Marsh Harrier then settled on its prey and held it under water for about 10 minutes, possibly to drown it.

The point where this took place is in a wide area from the shore where the water was just deep enough for this act, and it seems possible the Marsh Harrier struck here deliberately. The Eurasian Coot was able to be held against the bottom of the lake by the Marsh Harrier's body and legs while its own belly just touched the surface. The ends of the Marsh Harrier's tail feathers were in the water.

At first the Marsh Harrier moved as if unsteady and a couple of times a wing of the Eurasian Coot flapped above the surface, showing the bird was still alive. After a while the Marsh Harrier rested still, looking very strange some 5 metres offshore in the calm water.

After some 10 minutes the harrier laboriously dragged the dead Eurasian Coot to the shore. It did this in several bursts, by rising just into the air on flapping wings and dragging with one leg fully extended and the Eurasian Coot hooked on its talons.

The Marsh Harrier settled at the edge of the water and fed for at least 30 minutes. At first it seemed to pluck feathers from the dead bird, then to rip bits of flesh. While feeding the Marsh Harrier had its back to the water and after almost every bite it moved its head as though looking along the shore in both directions and alert for intrusion.

A.J. Peacey

(The holding of the Eurasian Coot under water for ten minutes described above has striking similarity with Hollands (1984), who describes a Marsh Harrier holding an Eurasian Coot under water "for ten minutes" (p.134). However, the circumstances described by Peacey above and Hollands (1984) are rather different. The Marsh Harrier described by Hollands (1984) appeared, from the description given, to have killed the Eurasian Coot prior to holding its prey under water and Hollands (1984) attributes the ten minute period to the Marsh Harrier having "been tired" (p.134) as a result of earlier efforts to carry the Eurasian Coot to the shore, an attempt finally abandoned. Hollands (1984)

goes on to say he has seen Marsh Harriers "pluck birds (coot) out of a flock on the water and make off with apparent ease" (p.135). He also records an Eurasian Coot being caught, falling from a Marsh Harrier talons back into water and "far from being dead, sat up in the water, shook itself and swam off to rejoin the flock as though nothing had happened" (p.135). This description, showing that the striking and seizing of an Eurasian Coot by a Marsh Harrier does not automatically or even readily result in the early death of the bird taken, adds weight to the idea that the ten minute periods in both cases, may have been to kill the captured prey.

Ed.).

### Reference:

Hollands, D (1984), *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of Australia*, Nelson, Victoria.

## 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 April to July 1990.

Compiled by Rodney Vervest.

### DOWN SOUTH

Cape Petrel - 2, 15/7/90, North Mole - MC, BB, PH  
Broad-billed Prion - 1 beach-washed, 7/6/90, Leighton Beach - GM  
Little Shearwater - 1, beach-washed, Sorrento - Anon.  
Pacific Heron - 1, 20/6/90, Della Road, Woodvale - JH, CW  
Cattle Egret - 2, 20/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - JH, CW  
Little Egret - 2, 15/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL \* 1, 26/7/90, Lake Joondalup - GL  
Eastern Reef Egret - 1, 13/6/90, Jurien marina - NT \* 1, 15/7/90, North Mole - MC, BB, PH  
Glossy Ibis - 2, 18/5/90, Thomsons Lake - TK \* 8, 20/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - MBr \* 5, 22/6/90, Herdsman Lake - MBr \* 5, 5/7/90, Della Road, Woodvale - CW \* 6, 18/7/90, Herdsman Lake - MCr \* 6, 30/7/90, Herdsman Lake - MO  
Sacred Ibis - 50+, 22/6/90, Guildford - AJM  
Chestnut Teal - 1 pair, 18/5/90, Thomsons Lake - TK \* 1, 21/5/90, Alfred Cove - JD \* 1 male, 18/7/90, Lake Claremont - MCr  
Pink-eared Duck - a pair with 2 ducklings, 18/7/90, Lake Claremont -

MCr  
 Hardhead - 4, 7/5/90, Alfred Cove - TK  
 Whistling Kite - 1, 28/6/90, Forrestdale Lake - PA \* 14, 4/7/90,  
 Baldvis Road - JH, PA  
 Marsh Harrier - 1, 24/6/90, Riverton Bridge - JH  
 Peregrine Falcon - 1, 16/5/90, Wesfeeds Bin, Bentley - JH  
 Australian Hobby - 1 immature road kill, 1/6/90, Morley - RS  
 Brown Quail - 10, 4/6/90, Albany - MC, BB  
 Black-tailed Native-hen - present, 16/6/90, Carine Swamp - JD \*  
 present, 9/7/90, Lake Monger - JR \* 13, 20/7/90, Deepwater Lagoon,  
 Gingin - JP, CW  
 Bush Thick-knee - 1 injured, 23/5/90, nr. Katanning - AH  
 Red-kneed Dotterel - 3, 18/5/90, Lake Claremont - MB, KC \* 6, 20/7/  
 90, Mogumber West Road (winter wet) - JP, CW  
 Hooded Plover - 2, 13/4/90, Cowaramup Beach - MBr  
 Banded Stilt - 300+, 9/6/90, Rottnest - MB, KC  
 Red-necked Stint - 200+, 28/6/90, Forrestdale Lake - PA  
 Great Skua - 2, 23/7/90, North Mole - MCr  
 Little Corella - 500, 12/6/90, Ellendale Pool, Greenough - NT  
 Western Rosella - 1, 30/6/90, Embleton Golf Course - FC  
 Pallid Cuckoo - 1, 18/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL \* 1, 24/5/90,  
 North Lake Reserve - JD  
 Fan-tailed Cuckoo - 1, 15/6/90, North Lake Reserve - JD  
 Red-backed Kingfisher - 1, 26/7/90, Brunswick Junction - GL  
 White-backed Swallow - 4, 2/6/90, Brookton - NT \* 2, 15/6/90,  
 Cervantes - NT \* 2, 20/7/90, Mogumber West Road - JP, CW  
 Hooded Robin - 7, 7/4/90, Flynn Road-The Lakes - MC, BB  
 Red Wattlebird - 29+, 7/5/90, Lake Joondalup North - NH  
 Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater - 1, 19/7/90, Guilderton - JP, CW  
 Yellow-plumed Honeyeater - 1, 29/6/90, Bateman - ED  
 Brown-headed Honeyeater - 3, 15/6/90, Lake Joondalup North - GL  
 White-cheeked Honeyeater - 8-12, 6/6/90, Swanbourne - PP  
 Australian Magpie-lark - 47, 4/7/90, Tonkin Highway, Maddington  
 RSm

## UP NORTH

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 15, 28/6/90, between Carnarvon and Dorre Island  
 - MCr  
 Black-tailed Native-hen - 57, 5/5/90, Hamelin Station - MC, BB  
 White-winged Tern - 1, 11/5/90, Broome Sewage Ponds - RN  
 Common Bronzewing - 10, 8/6/90, Wiluna Road from Leinster - NT  
 Black-eared Cuckoo - 1, 3/7/90, Dorre Island - MCr  
 Collared Kingfisher - 1, 18/4/90, Cape Keraudren - MC, BB  
 Yellow Wagtail - 2, 29/4/90, Roebuck Bay Caravan Park, Broome - MC,  
 BB  
 Mangrove Robin - 2, 7/10/89, Cape Keraudren - BB et al  
 Kimberley Flycatcher - 2, 14/5/90, Crab Creek - RN  
 Clamorous Reed-Warbler - 1, 12/5/90, Broome - RN  
 Brown Songlark - 6, 2/7/90, Dorre Island - MCr  
 Redthroat - 6, 30/4/90, New Beach, Carnarvon - MC, BB  
 Slaty-backed Thornbill - 2, 10/6/90, The Granites-Mt Magnet - AJ, RJ  
 Black Honeyeater - several, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN \* 20-30, 10/7/90,  
 East Pilbara - AJ et al  
 Pied Honeyeater - 1, 16/4/90, 100km south of Nanutarra - MC, BB \*  
 several, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN  
 Red-headed Honeyeater - 10, 30/4/90, Broome - MC, BB \* 1, 13/5/90,  
 Broome - RN  
 Red-browed Pardalote - 2, 16/4/90, Lyndon River - MC, BB \* 1, 3/5/90,  
 Ashburton River, Nanutarra  
 Painted Firetail - 6+, 25/4/90, Karratha-Roebourne Road - RN  
 Masked Woodswallow - many, 25/4/90, near Karratha - RN

## KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

AH - Anne Hepworth	MBr - Mary Bremner
AJ - Allan Jones	MC - Margery Clegg
AJM - A J Malcolm	MCr - M Craig
BB - Bryan Barrett	MO - Margaret Owen
CW - Chris Wilder	NH - Neil Hamilton
ED - Elizabeth Davies	NT - N Tyrer
FC - Fred Coles	PA - Peter Anson
GL - Graham Lintle	PH - Peel Howden
GM - George Miller	PP - Peter Piggford
JD - Jack Donchoe	RJ - Rose Jones
JH - Jack Hunt	RN - Richard Nowotny
JP - Julian Pegler	RS - Ray Shulz
JR - John Roberts	RSm - Rod Smith
KC - Kate Creed	TK - Tony Kirkby
MB - Max Bailey	

## SCOPEWEST

Greetings to all SCOPEWESTERS !

To those members not already taking part why not ring the office and enquire about the action-packed world of the 'wetfoot'.

Progress has been excellent. April was the best survey month so far with almost complete coverage. A few minor sites (probably dry) were left out.

Monthly totals of individual waterbirds using SCOPEWEST wetlands so far are as follows:

October	31,769
January	58,482
April	38,579

Further work on the computer programme will allow us a more detailed analysis later in the project.

Significant falls of rain over much of the study area in July have resulted in good levels of water in many wetlands. I hope none of you were caught in those tremendous storms that lashed the coast at this time, one of which resulted in a fairly heavy fall of hail in southern parts of the study area. The Meteorological Bureau reported a 'car being buried up to its wheel arches'!

Waterbird numbers at Scopewest wetlands have been low overall due to dispersal but the amount of water in certain parts of the study area should result in a good breeding season. With this in mind I would like to request that you all brush up on the techniques used in filling out the breeding section on the Scopewest data sheet. Instructions can be found on pages four and five of the Field Record Book. October, the next survey month, is an important month in which we should make maximum efforts to locate and record details of breeding activity. Please call me at the office if you wish to discuss any aspects of the survey.

The wing and nasal tagging programme will also commence again in October and anyone interested in being involved should contact me at the office. Your participation is welcome and this activity provides a unique opportunity for volunteers to see waterbirds at close hand and often at their breeding grounds. Although 'messy' at times (air raids!) causing volunteers to suffer considerable indignity, no one has been 'attacked' or inadvertently been fitted with a nasal saddle.

There are many reports of nasal-tagged ducks on metropolitan lakes but few reports outside the metro area. It will be very interesting to note any records of tagged ducks in the south-west during the next Annual Waterfowl Count in November 1990. Observers are requested to keep a sharp eye out for ducks, specifically Pacific Black Ducks and also egrets, spoonbills, ibis and White-faced Heron. Interesting movements have occurred recently - a Great Egret banded on the south coastal plain was seen at Katanning and a Straw-necked Ibis banded in the same area, was noted at Broome.

Finally, a detailed preliminary report should have been sent to you some months back. If you have not received it, please call and I will arrange for a copy to be sent. A report on Scopewest will be presented in the forthcoming National RAOU Newsletter also.

## ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNT

The Annual Waterfowl Count is scheduled to run from Saturday 17th November to Sunday 25th November. This may be the last November count we conduct as funding for this project will only last until the March count in 1991. As this will possibly be our last chance to do a coordinated count during the breeding season I would like to ensure we cover all wetlands. If you know anyone who can help, particularly in country areas, please get them to call me at the RAOU Office (364 6202). The recruiting letter will go out to all regular duck counters in mid-September and I urge you to respond quickly. If you are not a duck counter, now would be

an opportune time to join this legendary team. Remember, if you see a chance for covering any extra areas during the count period, ring me and I will arrange a wetland 'package' for you.

R Vervest

### PEAT MINING - LAKE MUIR NATURE RESERVE

Earlier in the year, a proposal to mine peat at Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon (Lake Muir Nature Reserve) was submitted for public comment by the Environmental Protection Authority.

Those of you who have visited this nature reserve (60 kms east of Manjimup) will have experienced the rich and varied birdlife in surroundings that have a distinct grandeur. Lake Muir itself is 11 kms long by 4 kms wide and has been known to support up to 50,000 waterfowl (Annual Waterfowl Count, March 1989).

A series of fresh/brackish lagoons (within the nature reserve) grace the eastern side of Lake Muir and also support a good variety of waterbirds.

RAOU attention was drawn to the reserve in 1981 with the commencement of the South-west Waterbird Study - a collaborative effort between the RAOU and the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Data was gathered regularly from Lake Muir and some 280 other wetland nature reserves. The results of this five year project culminated in the publishing of a substantial report in 1988 (RAOU Report No. 30 1988, Waterbirds in Nature Reserves of South-Western Australia).

During these early surveys, the importance of the lagoons was recognised for the occurrence of the rare Australasian Bittern. In an effort to gather more information on the breeding ecology of this species and document seasonal abundance of waterbirds, the RAOU and CALM devised a one year study at Byenup Lagoon. This wetland is the northernmost of a series of three major wetlands east of Lake Muir. During the monthly surveys data were also collected on Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon, the proposed mine site, in itself a significant wetland and known to support the Australasian Bittern (see RAOU Report No. 47).

The combined studies, with occasional other surveys, amount to eight years of data collection, the result of efforts by many RAOU members and professional ornithologists, such that the RAOU and CALM are able to comment authoritively on the many natural features of the reserve.

The mining company has held leases in the reserve since 1971 and has mined peat in nearby wetlands for a number of years. Entirely within existing rights, the company forwarded a proposal to extract peat for 20, possibly 40 years, at Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon.

Lake Muir Nature Reserve is classed 'C', affording only a minimal protection status and the current leases have been a 'stumbling block' in upgrading the status to 'A', a rating, by all criteria it truly deserves. The nature reserve was considered for nomination under the RAMSAR convention (see elsewhere in this issue) which would have placed it within the context of global significance. The reserve was eventually not submitted for nomination; the decision being complicated by mining lease arrangements.

The Environmental Protection Authority, after considering some 50 separate submissions - both RAOU and CALM lodging substantial documents - published its response to the mining proposal in June 1990, putting two recommendations:

**Recommendation 1** - The Environmental Protection Authority concludes that the mining company has not demonstrated the environmental acceptability of the proposal to mine peat from Tordit-Gurrup Lagoon and produce carbon products, as described in the Public Environmental Review, and recommends that the proposal not proceed.

**Recommendation 2** - The Environmental Protection Authority recommends that the classification of the Lake Muir Nature Reserve (No. 31880) be amended from 'C' class to 'A' class as a matter of priority.

The Environmental Protection Authority recommendations bode well for the future. It represents a commitment at a significant

level to the preservation of wetlands and in no small part, the RAOU, particularly members who have gathered data at the Reserve, have played a vital role in the outcome.

R Vervest

### RAMSAR CONVENTION

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat was prepared and adopted at a conference held in Ramsar, Iran in 1971. The conference was convened by the Government of Iran and was sponsored by the International Waterfowl Research Bureau (IWRB) with co-sponsors, including the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), the International Biological Programme, the International Council for Bird Preservation and the World Wildlife Fund.

As a member State of the United Nations, Australia is automatically involved in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), established in 1972, while also a member of UNESCO and FAO as well as being a State member of IUCN through the Department of Home Affairs and Environment. Australia is also a member State of IWRB, the Executive Officer of the RAOU, Dr. P. Moors being the non-government member.

Criteria for the Ramsar Convention for identifying Wetlands of International Importance are that:

A Wetland should be considered internationally important if it:

- regularly supports either 10,000 ducks, geese and swans, or 10,000 coots, or 20,000 waders or;
- regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or sub species of waterfowl or;
- regularly supports 1% of the breeding pairs in a population of one species or sub species of waterfowl.

General criteria for identifying Wetlands are that wetlands should:

- support an appreciable number of rare, vulnerable or endangered species or sub species of plant or animal, or;
- be of special value for obtaining the genetic and ecological diversity of a region because of the quality of peculiarities of its flora and fauna or;
- be of special value as the habitat of plants or animals at a critical stage of their biological cycles or;
- be of special value for its endemic plant and animal species or communities.

The value of representative or unique wetlands may be considered internationally important if the wetland is a particularly good example of a specific type of wetland characteristic of its region.

Prior to 1990 there were twenty-four Australian wetlands on the Ramsar list. Two of these were in the Northern Territory, ten in Tasmania, ten in Victoria and two in New South Wales. Western Australia had no wetlands listed under the Ramsar Convention. In July this year the Minister for Environment in the Western Australian Government announced that nine wetlands in Western Australia had been accepted for the Ramsar Convention list of wetlands of international importance. The wetlands approved are - the Ord River Flood Plain, Argyle and Kununurra Lakes, Roebuck Bay, Eighty Mile Beach, Forrestdale and Thompsons Lakes, Peel-Yalgornup System, Lake Toolibin, Vasse-Wonnerup System and the Lake Warden System.

It will be noted the nine wetlands are not all geographically specific and may vary from year to year - e.g. the Ord River Flood Plain. This is because it is the intention of the Convention to give general protection to the systems involved.

It is possible that Lakes McLeod, Gregory and Muir (among others) fall within the criteria for the Ramsar Convention. However insufficient data on these Lakes appears to be available to justify their inclusion at present.

The additional protection offered to the named wetlands is most welcome.

## RAOU CONGRESS 1991

### LOGO COMPETITION

The logo for next year's Congress has been chosen and can be seen above. It was submitted by Jenny Hunt who receives for her talent and efforts free registration to the 1991 Congress.

The Western Spinebill is an attractive small honeyeater, endemic to the South West. Our logo depicts a common behaviour, feeding on nectar from the kangaroo paw (WA's floral emblem), though it uses many native plants as food sources. The Western Spinebill is fairly easily seen in most bush areas near Perth and in other parts of the South West.



### THE CONGRESS

Planning is well under way. Kingswood College is the Congress venue and the Campout at Albany follows immediately from Sunday to Friday with a range of activities to suit all birders' interests. Both Congress and Campout will be well worth attending.

The dates: Congress 20 Sep - 22 Sep 1991  
Campout 22 Sep - 27 Sep 1991

The organisers wish to hear from those planning to attend the Congress and/or Campout and from those who wish to present papers. Poster presentations are also welcomed.

Please 'phone or write to the RAOU (WA Group) office in Perth.

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Daily recordings of birds seen within a 2km radius of Eyre Bird Observatory have resulted in some interesting trends. In February the rainfall was lower than average and the number of birds drinking at the birdbaths began to increase. In March the rainfall was 1.6mm, compared with an average of 25mm, and the total monthly count for the following birds was:

Brush Bronzewing	1000+
Pink Cockatoo	3500+
Australian Raven	2500+

Once the rains came numbers decreased until the total count in June was:

Brush Bronzewing	94
Pink Cockatoo	278
Australian Raven	89

The honeyeater numbers also increased as the nearby mallee trees began to blossom. Eleven species were recorded from April to June, Singing Honeyeater and New Holland Honeyeater being the most common, while the Yellow-plumed and White-fronted were the least common. During a banding session in June a Brown-headed Honeyeater banded 9 December 1985 was retrapped. A Spotted Pardalote was found dead during the Honeyeater Follow-up course. The specimen has been taken to the W.A. Museum for confirmation.

Weekly beach counts have continued with up to 12 species being recorded. One Oriental Pratincole and two Red-kneed Dotterel were seen on 25 April whilst two groups of Banded Stilt (20+) were seen on 3 May. Red-necked Stint were recorded during April and May, but none since. Red-capped Plover numbers

peaked in April (600+) and at the Nine Mile quite large numbers of Silver Gulls were recorded for March (380+) and May (320+). Since then weed banks have developed along the beach and bird totals have decreased. It will be interesting to follow these trends into the next quarter.

G. and G. Goodreid

## BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

Although it is a long time since our last report, many things have happened in the interim. The report of our first course appears elsewhere in this WA Bird Notes, so we will make this article relatively short.

Admitting that facts and figures tend to be boring, the upsurge in our attendance numbers this year are dramatic. To reduce the figures to their simplest form we will refer only to Visitor Nights and Day Visitors. These are the categories we used at Eyre. In Broome we further divide into categories, Chalet/units, campers and caravanners, Day visitors, tours and school excursions.

In 1988 (9 months) we had 633 Visitor Nights and 829 Day Visitors. In 1989 we had only a slight increase in Visitor Nights (although revenue was considerably higher), but Day Visitors numbered 1471. During the first 7 months of 1990 we have already had 1466 Visitor Nights and 1671 Day Visitors. Obviously all this activity has made a noticeable impact on our earnings, but we do not expect to break even this year, while we are running right up to our budget projections. The Day Visitors take up a great deal of our time for a very small return.

The BBO birdlist continues to grow. It presently stands at 228 species, with some notable recent additions. These include Crimson, Orange and Yellow Chat, Oriental Cuckoo, Australian and Baillon's Crake, Banded Stilt, White-fronted Honeyeater and Yellow-throated Miner. The latter are common enough at Derby but are the first recorded here.

Our deluge of visitors would have stopped our building programmes entirely were it not for the volunteer workers we've been fortunate enough to attract in 1990. Michael Craig made a return trip here during the wet and did another excellent piece of work. Doug Watkins and Shapelle McNee were relief wardens during our holidays followed by Richard Johnson and Kathryn Newton from Townsville. They remained after we returned and their contribution has been beyond praise. Martin Cross and Tessa Rule from the UK were two more willing and able workers. BBO is finally moving. It will be even better next year.

G. Hooper  
B. Wells

## NOTICES

Until further notice please direct all communications to the Editor, WA Bird Notes to the RAOU office, Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge WA 6153, owing to a forthcoming change of residential address.

### GENERAL MEETINGS

A charge of 50 cents is made at the monthly meetings to cover the hire of the venue (and provide supper). The charge barely covers these expenses. If those attending meetings will please pay 50 cents on arrival it will be appreciated.

### LESUEUR FORUM

An art exhibition, coinciding with National Art Week (13-20 October), is being organised by the Lesueur Forum to gain publicity and funds. It will be advertised in the newspapers, which will give venue and other details. Your support is requested.



