



Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

Australia Post Publication No WBH 1453

No 61 March 1992

Interesting Sightings in the Nullabor Region

In late October and early November 1991 we spent a week on the Nullabor Plain and its western and north-western fringes searching for Nullabor Quail-thrush as part of a WWF project. During this time we recorded a number of sightings of interest.

Little Button-quail — one nest with a clutch of three eggs, 21 km west of Haig (31 Oct).

Crested Pigeon — two at the Limekilns (15 km W of Naretha) and one 6 km E of Naretha. According to Storr (1986, 1987) this bird only occurs as a rare vagrant on the Nullabor.

Galah — several flocks totalling more than 120 birds 4 km S of Rawlinna (29 Oct), a flock of 60 just N of Rawlinna HS (30 Oct) and a flock of 80 at Speculation Bore (about 20 km SE of Rawlinna) (2 Nov). Storr (1987) states that the Galah is a scarce visitor in small flocks (up to 30 birds) in this part of the Nullabor, while local residents (M. & D. McQuie) told us that Galah numbers had increased dramatically during 1991.

Regent Parrot — a flock of 6 birds, probably all adults, in tall open eucalypt woodland 3 km E of Chifley (about 40 km E of Kalgoorlie), near the eastern limit of their range (28 Oct).

Blue Bonnet — three records (1, 2 and 4 birds) within 5 km of Rawlinna HS (29 Oct); six records (4, 5, 2, 1+, 1 and 2 birds) between 66 and 114 km N of Rawlinna (near the northern limit of its range) (30-31 Oct) and two birds 26 km W of Naretha (near the normal western limit of its range) (2 Nov).

Crested Bellbird — nest with a clutch of two fresh eggs being incubated, 81 km N of Rawlinna (30 Oct). The bellbird is rare on the Nullabor and has not previously been recorded breeding there at this time of year by Storr (1986, 1987).

Nullabor Quail-thrush — 16 birds recorded at 9 locations, from near Rawlinna to 98 km N of Rawlinna and east to Loongana.

Inland Thornbill — one group of 5-6 birds in myall woodland 114 km N of Rawlinna (31 Oct). This is probably the most southerly record for this area, as the species is absent from the Nullabor proper (Blakers et al. 1984, Storr 1986).

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill — two small groups were seen in myall woodland 114 km N of Rawlinna (31 Oct),

representing a southerly extension of known range in this area (Blakers et al. 1984, Storr 1986). They are absent from the Nullabor proper.

Slender-billed Thornbill — five small groups within 5 km of Rawlinna HS (29 Oct), two birds 29 km N of Rawlinna (29 Oct), two groups, including one bird flushed from a nest with a well incubated egg, 3 km N of Endeavour Bore (about 55 km N of Rawlinna) (30 Oct), 4-5 birds 3 km S of Haig (1 Nov) and four small groups on Arubiddy Station (2 Nov). These records are of interest because this thornbill appears to have declined in numbers and Storr (1986, 1987) gives no recent records north of Rawlinna.

Crimson Chat — two birds (one carrying food), 29 km N of Rawlinna (29 Oct) and two birds (both carrying food) 47 km N of Rawlinna (31 Oct). Both pairs were probably breeding, but no nest was found.

Orange Chat — two pairs, at two sites within 5 km S of Rawlinna HS (29 Oct).

Zebra Finch — one pair with a clutch of four fresh eggs in a nest in the base of the disused nest of a Wedge-tailed Eagle, near Waddilynia Rockhole (about 5 km S of Rawlinna HS). Storr (1986, 1987) states that the Zebra Finch is rare on the Nullabor and Blakers et al. (1984) show very few records for this area.

Black-faced Woodswallow — nest with one egg and one young out of the nest, 74 km N of Rawlinna (30 October) and a nest with three fresh eggs being incubated, 81 km N of Rawlinna (30 October).

The Nullabor Quail-thrush study is continuing. We are interested in being informed of any sightings of this bird that members may have.

A.H. Burbidge & L. Pedler

References:

- Blakers M, Davies SJJF and Reilly PN (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds* MUP Melbourne.
- Storr GM (1986) *Birds of the South-eastern Interior of Western Australia* Records of the WA Museum Supplement No. 26.
- Storr GM (1987) *Birds of the Eucla Division of Western Australia* Records of the WA Museum Supplement No. 27.

Second Gibberbird Sighting in Western Australia

On 7 March 1991, while in the company of Greg Barrett, in modified Salmon Gum woodland with saltbush understorey some 10k South-East of Kalgoorlie, I observed a small pipit-like bird on the ground. The resemblance to a pipit was so strong except for the size, that we remarked on it, until the bird turned to reveal a yellow front. We also noticed white markings on the end of the tail.

Our tentative field identification was female Orange Chat. However when checking the Orange Chat illustrations in Simpson and Day (1984) the absence of yellow on the rump and the presence of the white tail tip markings ruled this out and Gibberbird (on the same page) seemed likely. The pipit-like behaviour was further evidence of our sighting being a Gibberbird — Pizzey (1980) notes the similarity of behaviour to Richard's Pipit. The Gibberbird is significantly smaller than a pipit — we remarked on the small size.

Another possibility considered and discarded was Yellow Wagtail. This species has a relatively long tail without white on the tip.

We concluded the bird sighted near Kalgoorlie was a Gibberbird. The only other report of this species from WA is that of Howell (1991).

A. Chapman

References:

Howell J (1991) *Gibberbird in Western Australia*, Western Australian Bird Notes, No. 59 September 1991.

Pizzey G (1980) *A field Guide to the Birds Of Australia*, Collins, Sydney.

Simpson K & Day N (1984) *The Birds of Australia, A Book of Identification*, Lloyd O'Neil, South Yarra.

(Jim Howell's sighting was about three months previous, in December 1991 and some 500 kilometres NNE. It is possible that the Kalgoorlie bird was of the same group as seen at Carnegie, given that both sightings are over 1000 k from the nearest previously reported area of Gibberbird. Gibberbird should now enter the list of WA birds. Ed.)

Observations

Compiled by R. Vervest and A.H. Burbidge

Little Bittern - 5, 9/1/92, Quitjup Lake (D'Entrecasteaux N.P) induced to call by observer's vocalisations of 'bittern advertising call' - RJ * nesting, 15/12/91, Lake Jasper, W. side - RJ * calling, 22/12/91, Lake Saide, nr Denmark: nest found on 10/1/92 - RJ
Australasian Bittern - 5, 9/1/92, Owingup Swamp, three observed feeding - RJ

Great Egret - 1, 5/12/91, Orange Grove Rd, Kalamunda, nesting in Marri in swamp, a new breeding area - via EMcC

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 7/1/92, Clifton Rd Swamp - RV * 1, 11/1/92, Barrett-Lennards Lake (Gingin) - RV * 2, 15/1/92, Amarillo Pool, Serpentine River - JH

Black-breasted Buzzard - 2, 11/11/91, North-West Highway N. of Kalbarri turnoff, feeding on roadside kill - CWN

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, 12/1/92, Amarillo Pool, Serpentine River - JH, PH

Malleefowl - 1, 31/10/91, 160 kms N. of Northampton - BB

Baillon's Crake - 1, 15/1/92, Spectacles Reserve, E. Gingin - BBu

Australian Crake - 7, 14/12/92, Lake McLarty - JH

Spotless Crake - 19, 22/12/92, Owingup Swamp, nest with four eggs - RJ

Pacific Golden Plover - 1, 17/11/91, Emu-Ballajura ponds - JB

Eastern Curlew - 4, 9/12/91, N. Mandurah Traffic Bridge - TJ

* 3, 14/12/92, Mandurah, between bridges - JH

Whimbrel - 4, 14/12/91, Mandurah, between bridges - JH * 8, 9/1/92, Halls Head - HVW

Grey-tailed Tattler - 10, 14/12/91, Mandurah, between bridges - JH

Terek Sandpiper - 3, 8/11/91, Alfred Cove - MC, GL

Bar-tailed Godwit - 1, 23/11/91, Karakin Lakes - DM

Pectoral Sandpiper - 1, 4/1/92, Lake Yangebup - PH * 1, 4/1/92, Forrest-Liddelow Swamp, Banjup - JH * 1, 7/1/92, Thomas

Rd (Pinjarra) - RV * 2, 10/1/92, Amarillo Pool, Serpentine River - JH * 2, 12/1/92, Alfred Cove - RAOU Excursion - 1, 14/2/92, Wannamal Nature Reserve - BBu

Long-toed Stint - 2, 23/11/91, Karakin Lakes - DM * 45, 14/12/91, Lake McLarty - JH * 48, 24/12/91, Amarillo Pool, Serpentine River - JH

Sanderling - 42, 13/12/91, Halls Head - JH

Ruff/Reeve - 1, 27/12/91, Lake McLarty - JH, IS * 1, 18/1/92

Coodanup - RAOU Excursion * 1, 19/1/92, Coodanup - JH

Oriental Pratincole - 1, 24/11/91, Bookerbidey Swamp, E of Goomalling - MB

Pacific Gull - 1, 1/1/92, Mandurah Boat Harbour - JH

Whiskered Tern - 6, 9/1/92, lake on Boat Harbour Rd, no previous records of this species on south coast between Augusta and Albany - RJ

Roseate Tern - 4, 13/12/91, Halls Head - JH

Common Noddy - 9/1/92, Lancelin Island, breeding - AB

Crested Pigeon - 1, 17/1/92, Lake Gngara - AB

Rainbow Lorikeet - flock, 12/11/91, nr. Warwick Grove Shopping Centre - MM * 2, Jan 92, Wanneroo area - AB * 4, 9/1/92, Burrendah: first record in 14 years by Anon observer

Regent Parrot - 6, 21/11/91, Lyons Rd, Wandi (nr. Jandakot) - MU

Grey Shrike-thrush - 1, 11/11/91, Cranbrook, nest in a bucket in shed, with two young - DL

Crested Bellbird - 1, 16/11/91, Dryandra - CW, G&RK

ObserverCodes

| | | | |
|-------|-----------------|------|-----------------|
| AB - | Allan Burbidge | IS - | Ian Standring |
| BB - | B. Barker | Jb - | John Brooke |
| BBu - | Bruce Buchanan | JH - | Jack Hunt |
| CW - | Chris Wilder | MB - | Mary Bremner |
| CWN - | C & W Napier | MC - | Michael Craig |
| DL - | D. Lawrence | PH - | Peel Howden |
| DM - | Dusty Millar | MM - | M. Massam |
| EMcC | Eric McCrum | MU - | Murray Unkovich |
| GL - | Graham Little | RJ - | Roger Jaensch |
| G&RK | Gail&RexKennett | RV - | Rodney Vervest |
| HVW - | Hank Van Wees | | |

Members Contributions

WHITE-PLUMED HONEYEATER IN EXMOUTH

My wife and I visited Exmouth and camped from October 9th to 12th 1991 at Norcape Lodge. The Lodge has a large swimming pool enclosure, with bar, which is very popular with the patrons of the Lodge. The area is open from early until midnight and during this time music is played over a sound system, the pool is well utilised and the result can vary from quiet to very noisy.

We were having lunch on our first day there, when I noticed birds flying to and from a Ficus Benjamina at one end of the bar. The ficus was in a pot under the verandah of the bar and was about 3 metres tall.

The birds were White-plumed Honeyeater and they were nesting. The nest was about 1.8 metres above the ground, composed of woven bark, hair, and cobwebs. The nest contained two young birds, partially feathered, who appeared to be getting a little too large for the nest.

The nesting site seemed to have been chosen with complete disregard for the humans using the pool area. Several times we saw people ducking to avoid the birds moving to and from the nesting site and people talking and laughing less than a metre from the nest appeared not to affect the birds at all. A bright yellow "party light" about 0.7 metres above the nest did not appear to disturb the birds, as when darkness fell all four birds sat on a branch beside the nest and roosted for the night there. Possibly the light gave off enough heat to make it very comfortable for the birds.

There may be a difficulty when the young birds start to fly, because of the proximity of the swimming pool and the large numbers of people who sometimes congregate there. If there are problems, however, I believe that there will be enough "helping hands" around to ensure that no harm comes to the family who have set up home in a most unusual place.

J.G. Little

SQUARE-TAILED KITE & AUSTRALIAN HOBBY

On 26th December 1991 some 20 kms North of Walpole on the Manjimup road, we saw two Square-tailed Kite flying slowly among and just above the treetops. They appeared to be covering an area about 300 metres square. We then noticed an Australian Hobby flying about 30 metres above the kites. Every now and again the Australian Hobby would stoop below the treetops to then climb again to a position above the kites which appeared to take no notice of their accompanist. When the Square-tailed Kite moved out of our sight we could follow their course by watching the Australian Hobby and when the hobby drew closer, sure enough, below it were the kites.

We assumed the Australian Hobby was taking advantage of the kite by pursuing any small bird that might be disturbed by them. We watched for over 20 minutes, but saw neither raptor make a kill.

J.& H. Start

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE & KANGAROO

While walking in the early morning (c. 6.30 am) along the edge of a semi-cleared paddock, one side partially cleared the other original banksia woodland, I observed a Wedge-tailed Eagle. It was gliding slowly above the banksia woodland some 3 metres above the trees, about 15 metres above the ground. It crossed the edge of the woodland some 70 metres in front of me and continued over the cleared area.

On reaching the cleared paddock the eagle lost height until it was about 5 metres above the ground. Directly in the Wedge-tailed Eagle flight path stood a clump of remnant Marri and banksia, four trees, about 12 metres in height and 100 metres from the woodland edge. The eagle glided upwards to over-fly the clump but it "halted" above it, gained a little height with a circle above the clump of trees and then descended with its talons down thrust to just over the tree tops.

This made two kangaroo leave the shelter of the clump and hop slowly towards the banksia woodland. The Wedge-tailed Eagle glided round the clump of trees and followed the kangaroo down their path some two to three metres behind them and on a level with the kangaroo heads — less than two metres above ground. It appeared as though the eagle was chasing the kangaroo for sheer devilment. As the kangaroo reached the banksias the eagle gained height and turned back on its original course.

Presumably the Wedge-tailed Eagle had previously adopted similar tactics with good result: the passage of the kangaroo disturbing suitable prey.

I have frequently noticed that Wedge-tailed Eagle are to be seen either perched or flying close to the ground in the early mornings. This probably reflects some lack of thermal activity at such hours but there may be a more positive explanation.

B. Buchanan

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| RAOU Office WA | Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road Canning Bridge WA 6153 |
| Telephone | (09) 364 6202 |
| Birding Hotline | (09) 364 7349 |
| Chairman | J. Blythe, 30 Troy Terrace, Daglish 6008 |
| Editor | B. Buchanan, PO Box 10 Wannamal 6505 |

Notes For Contributors

The Editor requests contributors to note :-

- *material concerning WA birds may be published
- *sightings in respect of non - WA birds will not normally be published
- *contributions should be written or typed with Double Spacing
- *WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- *copy will be edited where appropriate
- *contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary

**Deadline for the June Issue
24 April 1992**

RUFOUS TREECREEPER AT WOODVALE

On 20 January 1992 I saw a Rufous Treecreeper at Woodvale Nature Reserve, in the north Perth metropolitan area. A bird was first heard on 17 January and was still present at the site on 22 January, but was not seen or heard thereafter. However, A. Williams heard and saw a Rufous Treecreeper in similar habitat several hundred metres away on 24 January. When seen, it was foraging on the lower trunks of Tuart trees in tuart/banksia woodland.

According to Storr (1991) the Rufous Treecreeper was common in the Swan River district in the 1840's, but scarce by the 1890's. Storr and Johnstone (1988) could find only one record on the Swan Coastal Plain after 1920 - an observation by Nick Kolichis at Balcatta in 1974. The present record is therefore only the second from the coastal plain since 1920.

A. H. Burbidge

References

Storr GM (1991) *Birds of the South-west Division of Western Australia* Records of the Western Australian Museum Supplement No. 35.

Storr GM and Johnstone RE (1988) *Birds of the Swan Coastal Plain and adjacent seas and islands* Records of the Western Australian Museum Supplement No. 28.

BIRDING IN CANNING

To many the City of Canning may appear virtually birdless. However, this is far from the case. I have recorded 100 species (46 of which are waterbirds) since 1989.

The Canning River is by far the most significant birding area of the city. The river, with adjacent wetlands, acts as a major attraction to resident and migratory birds. Smaller bodies of water throughout the City of Canning are also valuable resting, feeding and breeding areas predominantly for resident birds.

Records prior to 1950 show Black Bittern breeding in the City and Bush Thick-knee were heard in the Cannington area up to and beyond 1954. Alas, these species are long gone and their habitats changed irreversibly. Much of the remaining original habitat and open land left is being developed causing birds such as the Black-shouldered Kite (breeding in the City) to move away.

Some raptor species are seen regularly. The electrification of the Perth-Armadale railway resulted in higher power lines which make excellent perches for Australian Kestrel, who wait to catch grasshoppers and the like disturbed by passing trains. Australian Hobby can be seen moving along the railway also, perhaps feeding.

The aerial on the Westfeeds grain silo in Bentley is a favourite perch of Peregrine Falcon, which can be seen quite often.

During December 1989 a Square-tailed Kite was seen frequently over houses in Queens Park (see WABN No 53 March 1990 Ed). Another was seen in April 1990 at Riverton Bridge being harassed first by Australian Raven then by Australian Kestrel and finally by a Marsh Harrier. Buff-banded Rail and Spotless Crake can easily be seen against the rushes at Riverton Bridge when the tide is out.

The species list (at 96 spp) proves for me the value bird watching in an area on a thorough and continuous basis. The City of Canning comprises the suburbs and parts of: - Welshpool, East Cannington, Cannington, Queens Park, Bentley, St. James, Wilson, Ferndale, Riverton, Lynwood, Shelley, Rossmoyne, Willetton and Canning Vale.

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|---------------------------|-----|
| Australasian Grebe | C B | Australian Pelican | C |
| Darter | C | Little Pied Cormorant | C |
| Great Cormorant | C | Little Black Cormorant | C |
| Pacific Heron | R | White-faced Heron | C B |
| Great Egret | C | Little Egret | R |
| Rufous Night Heron | U | Glossy Ibis | R |
| Australian White Ibis | C | Straw-necked Ibis | U |
| Yellow-billed Spoonbill | C | Black Swan | C B |
| Australian Shelduck | C | Pacific Black Duck | C |
| Mallard | C | Grey Teal | C |
| Australasian Shoveler | U | Pink-eared Duck | U |
| Hardhead | U B | Maned Duck | C B |
| Blue-billed Duck | U | Musk Duck | U |
| Osprey | U | Black-shouldered Kite | C B |
| Square-tailed Kite | R | Brown Goshawk | C |
| Collared Sparrowhawk | C | Little Eagle | U |
| Marsh Harrier | U | Peregrine Falcon | U |
| Australian Hobby | U | Australian Kestrel | C |
| Buff-banded Rail | C B | Spotless Crake | U |
| Dusky Moorhen | C B | Purple Swamphen | C B |
| Eurasian Coot | C B | Black-fronted Plover | C B |
| Black-winged Stilt | C | Banded Stilt | R |
| Red-necked Avocet | U | Common Sandpiper | C |
| Greenshank | C | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | R |
| Red-necked Stint | R | Silver Gull | C |
| Caspian Tern | C | Crested Tern | C |
| Feral Pigeon | C B | Laughing Turtle-Dove | C B |
| Spotted Turtle-Dove | C B | Common Bronzewing | U |
| White-tailed Black Cockatoo | U | Galah | C |
| Little Corella | R | Red-capped Parrot | U |
| Port Lincoln Ringneck | C B | Pallid Cuckoo | C |
| Shining Bronze Cuckoo | C | Fork-tailed Swift | R |
| Laughing Kookaburra | C | Sacred Kingfisher | C B |
| Rainbow Bee-eater | C B | White-backed Swallow | R |
| Welcome Swallow | C B | Tree Martin | C B |
| Richard's Pipit | C B | Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | C B |
| White-winged Triller | U | Red-capped Robin | R |
| Rufous Whistler | C B | Willie Wagtail | C B |
| Grey Fantail | U | Little Grassbird | C |
| Clamorous Reed Warbler | C B | | B? |
| Western Gerygone | C | Inland Thornbill | C |
| Western Thornbill | R | Yellow-rumped Thornbill | C B |
| Varied Sittella | U | Red Wattlebird | C B |
| Little Wattlebird | C B | Singing Honeyeater | C B |
| Brown Honeyeater | C B | New Holland Honeyeater | R |
| Western Spinebill | U | White-fronted Chat | R |
| Mistletoebird | C | Striated Pardalote | C |
| Silvereye | C | Australian Magpie-lark | C B |
| Black-faced Woodswallow | U | Grey Butcherbird | C B |
| Australian Magpie | C B | Australian Raven | C B |

C = Common, seen all year B = Breeds R = Rare, only seen once or twice U = Uncommon, usually seen at a particular time of year only eg during migration or dispersal

J. Hunt

RAPTORS AND SPIDERS

I recently made a brief visit to the Shire of Murchison, the only Western Australian Shire without a town. The locality of Murchison has a grand total of twenty-three inhabitants. Birds were not plentiful either, but camping on the banks of the Murchison River I was fortunate to come across a large stick nest. This proved to be the nest of a Black-breasted Buzzard in which (probably) eggs were being brooded, to judge from the actions of the sitting bird.

The partner of the sitting bird was twice seen to visit the nest and perch on the edge briefly. On neither occasion did food appear to be brought. On one of these occasions, on being attacked by an Australian Magpie and my moving, the bird on the edge of the nest rose and circled above the nest calling loudly. Hollands (1984) describes the call as "a loud, hoarse yelping" (p 191), which seemed a reasonable description. During the evening (8 pm) and in the morning (6.15 am) one of the birds gave what Hollands (1984) describes as "a harsh, scraping sound.....used to induce other adult to go hunting or when impatient for it to return" (p 191).

Inspection of the nest shortly after this morning call showed one of the buzzards sitting about two metres from the nest in the same tree, apparently taking the morning sun and doing a little preening. The bird sat quietly for 45 minutes in the same spot while I circled slowly round the nest tree obtaining fine views from all directions.

About 100 metres from the nest of the Black-breasted Buzzard, also in a River Red Gum, was the nest of a Little Eagle. The eagle too appeared to be brooding eggs. By contrast with the buzzard, the Little Eagle was much more wary and tended to slip off the nest early and glide away behind cover. Only one Little Eagle was seen.

Hollands (1984) refutes a "legend" concerning Black-breasted Buzzard, that they never perch in trees. My testimony is scarcely necessary, but apart from the perching incident mentioned above, in the afternoon a Black-breasted Buzzard sat in the tree containing the Little Eagle nest for about twenty minutes, after which I disturbed both species. Another legend concerns buzzards breaking eggs with stones. The Australian Bird Watcher Vol 14 No's 3 and 4 September and December 1991 contains interesting articles describing such action.

While following a mixed flock of Southern Whiteface and Chestnut-rumped Thornbill in the scrub I saw ahead what at first sight I took to be a suspended nest. It was hanging by spiders web from the branch of a bush. However closer inspection revealed the "nest" to be a live young Chestnut-rumped Thornbill (judged by the feathers) wholly trapped and unable to move, caught by a spiders web and hanging head down. When I removed the web, with some difficulty, the thornbill flew off - apparently unharmed.

Koch (1980) writes of the Bird-eating Spider "known to capture small birds (including chickens)" and which occurs "in arid inland parts of Western and South Australia" (p 13). I did not have Koch's book with me to confirm whether the spider in a large web adjacent to the trapped bird was of the bird-eating species. The web seemed very strong and parted with an audible snap. It may be that the entanglement of small birds in spider web is more common than the paucity of references to it in the ornithological literature would suggest.

References: Koch LE (1980) *The Red-back Spider and Other Venomous Creatures* WA Museum Perth

Hollands D (1984) *Eagles Hawks and Falcons of Australia*

Thomas Nelson Victoria

B. Buchanan

CANNING STOCK ROUTE - SOUTH

In July 1991 we were fortunate to travel with a convoy to No. 6 Government Well near Pierre Spring on the Canning Stock Route. The main purpose of the trip was to restore potable water to the well.

Our journey from Geraldton to Wiluna was uneventful, the main highlight being Chiming Wedgebill and a very noisy feeding flock of Grey-crowned Babbler. The second part of the journey took us from Wiluna on a detour through Granite Peak Station to No. 5 Government Well as recent rains had made the Lake Nabberu section of the Canning Stock Route impassable. Granite Peak Station is not open to the public. The area looked interesting: however, our convoy of non-birders was not in the habit of stopping and we were not able to do the area justice as far as noting bird species was concerned.

The track between Wells Nos 5 and 6 (about 20kms) was in reasonable condition and at the time of our visit the flora, including the spinifex, appeared lush and green due to the rains. Prior to arrival at Pierre Spring an unexpected stand of blackboys (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) was passed.

Pierre Spring was originally named "Diamond of the Desert" by John Forrest, who subsequently renamed it after Tommy Pierre, one of his aboriginal guides. River Red Gums (*E. camaldulensis*) are the main tree species and the spring is to the south of No. 6 Well. The surrounding area includes acacia woodland, claypans, rocky outcrops and low sand ridges interspersed with spinifex.

We spent each day exploring the area round camp. Several species were seen at the "Spring" every day, including Port Lincoln Ringneck, Mulga Parrot, Yellow-throated Miner, Crested Pigeon and Crested Bellbird. Galah flew into the trees each day, sometimes up to 12 birds. A group of 5 Pied Butcherbird stayed close to our campsite. Pied, White-fronted and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater were heard or seen at every location investigated, but Singing Honeyeater were seen on two or three occasions only. Two White-plumed Honeyeater were seen near camp, always in the same area. Only one Black Honeyeater was seen. On several walks flocks of up to 5-6 Crimson Chat (both male and female) and one flock of 11 birds, were seen flying in a southerly direction. One flock was found foraging in a low tree. Five Zebra Finch were observed feeding on the ground one morning.

The large eucalypts held many old nests high at their tops. An Australian Hobby appeared interested in two separate nests. A pair of Brown Falcon visited one particular nest each morning, calling loudly on each visit. They were seen mating twice. They did not appear to visit the nest much during the day, although we were not present all the time. A fire was constantly alight during the day under these nests whilst the undergrowth surrounding the well was being cleaned away. A disused nest (thought to be that of a Wedge-tailed Eagle) was discovered in a claypan about two kilometres from camp. It was only about 4 metres from ground level. Two Wedge-tailed Eagle were seen twice but they did not appear to be abundant in the area.

On our daily walks we were surprised by the low numbers of some species. Only two Grey Fantail, one Willie Wagtail near a low sand ridge, two Rufous Whistler, a small number of Weebill, Yellow-rumped and Inland Thornbill and two Striated Pardalote, with another heard. The pardalote were seen going to a hollow several times. One each of Grey Butcherbird, Red-browed Pardalote, Black-eared Cuckoo and White-winged Triller (male) were counted.

Some areas were sparsely vegetated and it was a surprise to see a pair of Chestnut-rumped Thornbill refurbishing a nest in a dead stump only 300 millimetres from the ground and very unprotected. Southern Whiteface were carrying material to nest in a dead stump a metre from the ground. Chestnut-rumped Thornbill were seen frequently in small groups or pairs. Pairs of Red-capped Robin seemed to be in territories each of which appeared very close to the next. A pair of Red-capped Robin was seen chasing a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, groups of three of which were seen flying in circles after each other making a one note trilling call. Caterpillars were on the ground in great numbers and the cuckoos were seen several times with them. One pair of cuckoos was seen mating.

A pair of Torresian Crow was seen almost every day and were carrying nest material to the top of a eucalypt. Four Little Crow flew by one day. These were the only corvids seen.

Near our camp we discovered the bower of a Spotted Bowerbird. It was decorated mainly with white glass and green berries. We were lucky enough to watch the male one morning enticing a female into the bower. For over an hour he contorted his body and displayed to her, his pink crest raised, sometimes holding a large caterpillar in his bill, trying to draw her into the bower. Several times the female hopped into and out of, or through the bower, but she eventually became disinterested and flew off. On one occasion we thought there were three birds at the bower, but there may have been more. One bird was heard near a thicket in the mornings making its cat-like call and scratch marks were found in the sand where it had been. The bowerbirds also mimicked the Yellow-throated Miner and Australian Magpie.

Other birds seen near the camp were Australian Magpie, a family of Variegated Fairy-wren, White-browed Babbler and six Varied Sittella, which flew through once. Birds were heard almost every night. On two occasions we sat by a large hollow with droppings at the entrance and went spotting another night. However nothing was seen.

A visit to a hill near Mt Davis was a must. It is approximately 4 kms north-east of the Spring and is a spectacular sandstone formation 669m above sea level. Native White Cypress (*Callitris columellaris*) are to be found at the top. A Peregrine Falcon was seen here and evidence of a number of birds roosting in the many crevices was seen. Several dead kangaroos were seen near the summit. They appeared to have made an almost impossible climb for either water or shade. A trek to a waterhole 8kms west of No. 6 Well was very disappointing with only a small number of birds, although another bowerbird was seen. More dried remains of kangaroos were found also.

Our return journey from No. 6 Well to Wiluna was down the Canning Stock Route. Several species were seen that we had not observed at No. 6 Well. Between Nos. 6 and 4A Well Australian Kestrel, Spotted Harrier, Common Bronzewing and a pair of Red-capped Robin finishing their nest. At Windich Springs 10 Little Corella, a Pallid Cuckoo and a Black-faced Cuckoo- Shrike were added. Groups of 40+ Masked Woodswallows were seen beside the track and in the evening groups swirled above us calling loudly. A Brown Songlark was seen near 4A Well and a Richard's Pipit was also added to the list. A female Crimson Chat was found tending a nest containing 3 eggs.

Lake Naberu looked interesting, but we were on the road and unable to stop as the weather looked threatening and we had been warned the area became impassable in the wet. However Black Swan and Black-winged Stilt were heard in the night and

Black Swan, Australian Shelduck and other waterbirds could be seen in the distance on open water. Near No. 3A Government Well, two Australian Magpie-lark were seen on the track.

At a place called "granites" near No. 2A Well a pair of Hooded Robin were found to be carrying nest material and a Grey Shrike-thrush was also seen as well as another bower alongside an old one. Several flocks of Bourke Parrot were seen including one group of 20 birds.

A severe dust storm was experienced before we reached Wiluna. Flocks of Masked Woodswallow swirled round in the dust, seemingly undisturbed.

For those intending to travel the CSR, an interesting book is the "Canning Stock Route, A Travellers Guide for a Journey through History" Ronelle and Eric Gard (1990), Western Desert Guides, Wembley Downs, WA, gives all manner of facts.

K. Haythornthwaite and C. Wilder

(An interesting history of the construction of the Canning Stock Route is in Smith E (1985) *The Beckoning West, the story of H.S. Trotman and the Canning Stock Route* St George Books Perth based on Trotman's account of his work during the construction. Ed.).

MARSH HARRIER HUNTING

While watching two Cattle Egret on a winter-wet grass field near Armadale Golf Course on 13th November our attention was drawn by the urgent calls of two duck. They were half flying and half, frantically paddling back and forth in a small area of the flooded field. Overhead a Marsh Harrier was hovering some five metres above the water. Every time the harrier stooped, talons extended, the duck dashed to escape. We watched for about ten minutes until, eventually, the harrier was successful in seizing a small duckling in one talon. The Marsh Harrier carried its prey to a patch of dry ground some 30 metres away where two Pacific Black Duck were loafing less than 10 metres distant but they seemed to take no notice of the predator.

Owing to the length of the grass and rapid manoeuvres of the duck we were unable to observe their species. Both duck were dark coloured and wet. We thought they were most likely Pacific Black Duck.

J & H Start

Scopewest

True it is that the data gathering part of the SCOPEWEST project is now completed. As I write, the last bits of January 1992 data are trickling in and participants are to be congratulated on responding to the shorter survey period.

Up to July 91 (i.e. three surveys ago), 330,000 waterbirds had been counted on the coastal plain and I expect this figure to reach near half a million by the time the October 1991 and January 1992 data have been included. Literally tens of thousands of individual records testify to the fact that SCOPEWEST has been a project of highly-concentrated monitoring.

Another pleasing result is the coverage achieved. On average, only between 5 and 8 wetlands of 255 were left unsurveyed in each of the 10 survey periods. This is an excellent coverage rate. Of course, not only the waterbird counts conducted by the RAOU make up SCOPEWEST.

Considerable effort by CALM has gone into monitoring the 255 wetlands for the many environmental factors. This work has been carried out by only two CALM Officers! The full dataset (i.e. waterbirds, physical, chemical and vegetation data) is substantial.

Preliminary analysis of the data has revealed pronounced differences between waterbird usage and wetland types (e.g. lakes, river pools, winter-wets). Permanent lakes, for instance, are far the most significant in terms of abundance and species richness. Estuarine sites are also important, with winter-wets, drains and river pools being of lesser significance. Analysis has also revealed that different wetland types display marked differences in environmental attributes. For example, the deeper wetland types were the permanent, seasonal and river pools, fish abundance was highest in drains and river pools and wading zones in winter-wets and seasonals were markedly different from steep-sided drains and river pools.

In general, these results reflect current knowledge and understanding of wetlands on the coastal plain. As the data is refined and further analyses are conducted we expect to show closer relationships between waterbird usage and particular environmental factors — e.g. the effect of the presence of invertebrates etc. on waterbird usage. In all, 29 different environmental factors were measured and these will be interacted with 'your' waterbird data.

CALM have also completed their colour-marking programme and are still keen to receive any sightings. Great effort has gone into this aspect of the project which at times has been a perilous, exhausting and 'messy' business. We have not fully examined this data yet, but we expect to reveal new information on the movements of waterbirds between different wetland types.

Although the data collection has finished, there is much to be done to write up the project. I will no longer send data sheets to complete but for those who wish to continue with surveys, I shall continue to provide you with sheets on request. As the analysis and writing-up progresses, I will keep you in touch with results and news through WA Bird Notes and personal communications.

On a lighter note it is amusing to recall incidents that have occurred as part of the field work and SCOPEWEST has had its full share of 'incident'. In fact, I'm sure there is enough material for a book on 'encounters and happenings' during field work.

This epic tale is richly interwoven with feats of endurance (how long can you stand being pinned under an electric fence?), bravery beyond the call of duty (coming face-to-face with the stud bull — and the intense psychological battle that ensues), flights of fancy (usually linked to heat-induced hallucinations of strange species, sometimes birds), bewilderment (when a flock of 6000 ducks lifts the moment you arrive at the wetland) and 'the bizarre' (when you return from your survey and killer horses have "eaten" your car!)

These, and many other enlightening and uplifting experiences, have all been yours as part of SCOPEWEST and it has been pleasure to have sent you, dedicated, intrepid, unknowing and naked into the exciting world of wetlands and waterbirds.

R. Vervest.

BBCBQ

Big Bird's Clever Birdo Quiz is on waders — it is the season for wader watching.

1. Which migratory wader is normally the most numerous in WA ?
2. Do Sharp-tailed Sandpiper prefer wetlands of the coast or interior ?
3. When in WA how can the sexes of Greenshank be distinguished ?
4. With what other shorebird is the Black-fronted Plover often associated ?
5. Which, alone of the plover, lapwing and dotterel breeding in WA, makes a substantial nest ?
6. Eastern Curlew is almost identical in size and appearance to Eurasian Curlew. How will you be certain which of these two species you observe ?
7. Common Sandpiper "teeters" more than most other sandpipers. Why ?
8. Among gulls in WA, Silver Gull shares a unique feature with the South African Hartlaub's Gull. What is it ?
9. Which of the Pectoral Sandpiper sexes is the larger ?
10. Which is the larger in Australia, the Bar-tailed or Black-tailed Godwit ?

Answers on page 12

Notices

WA GROUP COMMITTEE 1992

| | |
|---------------|----------------|
| Chairman | John Blyth |
| Vice-Chairman | Chris Wilder |
| Secretary | Charlie Davis |
| Treasurer | Peter Anson |
| Committee | Allan Burbidge |
| | Brenda Newbey |
| | Rod Smith |
| | Tom Spalding |
| | Brian Wilson |

BEACH PATROLS

Volunteers are sought for the patrol of beaches, particularly during the winter months of May, June, July, August) when beach-washed specimens are most likely to be found (for a report on a major addition to knowledge from beach patrol, see WABN No. 31 September 1984.)

Those participating will be part of an Australia wide effort being conducted to increase knowledge of the bird species off our shores, the RAOU Australian Beach Patrol Scheme (see Wingspan No. 4 December 1991 p. 25)

If you would like to be involved please inform the RAOU Office, Canning Bridge.

SEABIRDING EXCURSIONS PROPOSED

In 1984 the first of a number of boat-based excursions was made to seek "little-known offshore seabirds" (see WABNNO. 32 December 1984). It is planned to re-new these trips if there is sufficient support to defray the inevitable costs of boat hire. If you are interested in taking part, please inform the RAOU Office, Canning Bridge.

BUNBURY FESTIVAL OF ART AND NATURE

During the Easter holidays the WA Group of the RAOU will take part in the Bunbury Festival of Art and Nature, the first of its kind to be organised by the Bunbury Council.

Geoff Shannon, a Bunbury member, is co-ordinating a programme of speakers and bird excursions and members in the area will help with the organisation.

The Bunbury Environment Centre has been made available by the Council for a programme of speakers and displays on important local bird habitats and RAOU activities.

Members are being approached to loan paintings or photographs as part of a display in the Bunbury Art Gallery.

This is an excellent opportunity for the WA Group to publicise our aims and activities. We look forward to a successful participation in the festival.

If you are visiting Bunbury during Easter (17 April-20 April) and would like to join in, please ring Allan Jones (09) 364.3975. Your help would be appreciated.

EASTER HOLIDAY AT SHANNON NATIONAL PARK

Combine a holiday with leading bird walks - 18th, 19th and 20th April 1992.

RAOU leaders are needed. Walks are being advertised and organised by CALM. Best campsites reserved for leaders (no charge). Telephone Jeff Kimpton, CALM, Northcliffe on (097) 767095 or (097) 767050 (reverse charge call) or Chris Wilder (09) 401.8329 as soon as possible for further details.

Eyre Report

Life at Eyre continues to be interesting and active. The seaweed came in just in time for our second week course participants to experience that lovely feeling of collecting fresh clumps of weed, loading it on to Betsy and chugging up to the dune to spread it over newly planted spinifex. The Pink Cockatoo and their young appear to be thoroughly enjoying the easy pickings; spinifex, euphorbia and nitre berries all on the menu at the same time.

Ducks were the feature of the last beach count. Thirty seven Grey Teal were on the ocean and three Pink-eared Duck were swimming in the shallow pools amongst the seaweed. One Red-kneed Dotterel has been sighted on the last three counts and last week four Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, three Grey Plover and two Red Knot were recorded. Red-capped Plover runners are still

being banded, a breeding season of nearly six months, from the end of August 1991 to at least the end of January 1992.

Despite the relatively low rainfall for 1991 many birds appear to have had a successful breeding season. Each day many young raven, bronzewing and currawong are coming to drink at the birdbaths. Malleefowl have been sighted close to the Observatory and most of the active mounds continue to be worked, although one fowl was found dead near a mound. Three active scrub-robin nests were located but ultimately only one breeding site appeared successful. Within a group of Varied Sittella sighted at the base of the scarp were three young, being fed by adult birds.

This year's bat course, led by Doug Watkins, has been exciting. Mist nets and harp traps initially set up along the North Track netted one Greater Long-eared Bat and three King River Eptesicus, this last being the first time this species has been caught at Eyre during a bat course.

A total of 369 Chocolate Bats were banded at the Cave and another three Greater Long-eared and Lesser Long-eared Bat were banded from nets and traps set at the base of the scarp.

Towards the end of March we have our birding course, just the right time to catch those autumn waders on their migratory path.

The Wardens

Cuckoo in the Southwest

One of the first tasks of 1992 in the Australian Birds Count (ABC) office was the analysis of cuckoo data. Seasonal movements of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo are discussed in Wingspan (March 1992) and the Shining Bronze-Cuckoo is treated in Cabbie's Chronicle No. 6 (the official newsletter of the ABC project).

Some interesting patterns of movement of cuckoo in South-west WA are beginning to emerge, but analyses highlight the need for more regular bird counts before these patterns can be accepted as accurate accounts of cuckoo migration. Let me whet your appetite for participating in the ABC by describing some cuckoo movements in the South-west.

Most cuckoo exhibit latitudinal movement, southwards in spring/summer and northwards in autumn/winter (see bar chart).

Fan-tailed, Pallid and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo are encountered at ABC sites from 31 S, to the coast (35 S) in spring/summer, suggesting that they move to wetter, cooler areas in this period. This is particularly true for the Fan-tailed Cuckoo because the greatest proportion of sites in which this species was seen in spring/summer was south of 34 S, whereas there was a more even spread of sites in autumn/winter.

There appears to be a slight southern extension of the range of the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo in spring/summer but, so far, its southernmost ABC site is Borden (34 19' S, 118 12' E). Perhaps this species will be encountered farther south if more ABC sites are established south of places like Margaret River, Nannup, Bridgetown, Tambellup and Borden.

