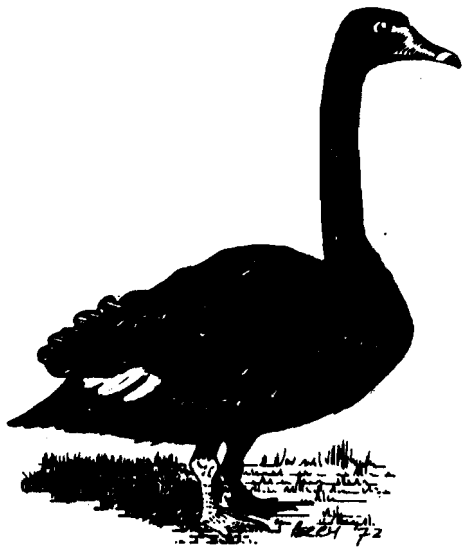


*W. Phillipson*



# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 71 September 1994

## For your Kimberley visiting list — Lake Gladstone

Lake Gladstone is in the south central Kimberley on Mt House Station. It is some 75km from the homestead over reasonable road (in the dry).

The Lake, formed in a shallow depression, is apparently permanent water. Visited in August, it was about 1 metre deep at the maximum. An irregular shape, some 500 metres by 300 metres in size when visited, with a 50 metre arm to the south east, the lake is obviously very much larger in the wet and over two metres deep.

The roads shown on the 1:250000 map sheet (1974 edition) as surrounding the Lake no longer exist, but with a little persistence the Lake may be found.

After driving 70+ km across dusty acacia scrub country, the appearance of a large body of water comes as a welcome surprise, even though marked on the map (and in the *Travellers Atlas*).

In August there were sizeable patches of open water, but the greater part comprised 'rush' — like *Baumea articulata* without the 'joints', most fallen and broken. In the wet, areas of open water would predominate.

While enjoying the scene it was crowned for me by the appearance of a mature White-bellied Sea-Eagle (a detestable name for so majestic a bird) which was promptly attacked/harassed by two Whistling Kites. The Lake is 170 km from Walcott Inlet and 240 km from the West Arm at Wyndham. There is a Whistling Kite nest on the eastern side of the Lake, with every sign of being of several years standing.

It would appear that there have not been many ornithological visits to Lake Gladstone as in the short time available during one afternoon and without a thorough survey, 27 species were observed which were not recorded in the appropriate 1<sup>0</sup> Block of the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (1984). (I should add that Storr GM (1980) mentions Lake Gladstone specifically in relation to 8 water bird species, two of which — Wandering Whistling-Duck and Green Pygmy-Goose, were not seen in August).

Those water birds, with the numbers recorded, not shown as being in the specific *Atlas* (1984) Block were :—

Australian Grebe — 12, Australian Pelican — 7, Little Black Cormorant — 10, Cattle Egret — 1, Intermediate Egret — 15, Glossy Ibis — 6, Australian White Ibis — 3, Straw-necked Ibis — 6, Royal Spoonbill — 2, Yellow-billed Spoonbill — 2, Magpie Goose — 37, Plumed Whistling Duck — 1000+, Grey Teal — 6, Pink-eared Duck — 1, Hardhead — 14, White-bellied Sea-Eagle — 1, Marsh Harrier — 1, Purple Swamphen — 2, Eurasian Coot — 9, Masked Lapwing — 4, Black-winged Stilt — 1, Wood Sandpiper — 2, Common Sandpiper — 1, Australian Pratincole — 1, Clamorous Reed-Warbler — 1.

Total: 25 water birds not in *The Atlas of Australian Birds* Block. In addition, other species seen and also absent from the *Atlas* were Spinifex Pigeon and Gouldian Finch, of which 5 juveniles were seen.

Other water birds noted (which are shown in the *Atlas* Block) were Great Egret (6), Pacific Heron (15), Little Pied Cormorant (4) and Black-fronted Plover (14).

The Pacific Heron were of two "varieties". Some were splendidly white of neck and dark of wing, such as are normally seen in the south-west, whereas others appeared to have had a blue-grey rinse, which noticeably affected the neck as well as other feathers. Similar members of the Pacific Heron 'blue rinse set' were seen elsewhere in the Kimberley.

The Lake also contains a very large and presumably old crocodile, seen clambering onto the bank among the Plumed Whistling-Duck, a Common Sandpiper, a Straw-necked Ibis and two Yellow-billed Spoonbill. The beast was some 2 metres+ in length with a very large body, making the crocodiles in the Hann River a short distance away look like tiddlers in contrast. The birds had to move to allow the newcomer to take up station, but seemed otherwise unmoved. I should not have felt so.

In the dry a non 4WD should reach the Lake, though care may be needed at dry creek crossings because of clearance.

Lake Gladstone should be on your list should you visit the Kimberley. Not only is it attractive to visit, but there is little like it in the southern Kimberley and nothing like it in the area in

which it is situated. In addition it is ornithologically interesting and information on the Lake is minimal.

As a bonus for the lonely grave enthusiasts, on an access track to the Lake (though not apparently the correct one) is a large horizontal stone cross beside a tree, apparently of stone not readily seen in the area.

B. Buchanan

#### References:

Blakers M, Davies SJF, Reilly PN (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, RAOU, Melbourne University Press.

Storr GM (1980) *Birds of the Kimberley Division, Western Australia*, WA Museum Special Publication No. 11, Perth.

*Travellers Atlas of Western Australia*, (1986) 3rd Edition, DOLA, WA.

## Observations

Compiled by the Observations committee. Shires in brackets.

### **SOUTH-WEST** (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

**Grey-headed Albatross** - 1, 23-25/6/94, Abrolhos Islands (Northampton) - JF, BF

**Cape Petrel** - 7, 7/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - GM

**Kerguelen Petrel** - 1, 15/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - MCr

**Prion spp.** - 6 birds of two species (from the Antarctic/Salvin's/Lesser Broad-billed/Slender-billed group), 15/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - MCr (note: prions can be difficult to distinguish even in the hand unless both age and sex are determined independently)

**Streaked Shearwater** - up to about 50, Apr-May 1994, Abrolhos Islands (Northampton) - JF, BF

**Wedge-tailed Shearwater** - 200+, 6/1/94, Halls Head (Murray) - MCr

**Little Pied Cormorant** - 409, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

**Cattle Egret** - 2, 11/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa

**Little Egret** - 26, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) - MCr, GM \* 1, 10/5/94, Lake Windabout (Esperance) - KD, PB \* 1, 9/6/94, Lake Warden (Esperance) - KD, PB (rarely recorded in this part of the state) \* 34, 7/8/94, Coodanup (Murray) - JB \* 1, 10/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa (this species seems to be increasing in numbers in the south-west)

**Australian White (Sacred) Ibis** - 118, 26/6/94, Guildford (Swan) - JM

**Peregrine Falcon** - 2, 16/7/94, Udumung Reserve, Wannamal (Gingin) - BB \* 1, 1/8/94, Mermaid Point, Waychinicup NP (Albany) - AB

**Australian Kestrel** - 2, March 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (scarce visitor to the islands) - JF, BF

**Buff-banded Rail** - 1, 13/6, 15/6 and 30/6/94, 10 km N of Cape Le Grande National Park (Esperance) (few records for this region) - SR

**Purple Swamphen** - 1, 27/7/94, Betts (Bodey) Swamp, Wannamal (Gingin) (apparently not previously recorded in the Wannamal wetlands) - BB

**Banded Stilt** - 9350, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for this site) - MCr, GM

**Greenshank** - 14, 10/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa (this number is unusual for this time of year)

**Black-tailed Godwit** - 49, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

**Great Knot** - 46, 2/7/94, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - TK

**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** - 2699, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

**Red-necked Stint** - 1829, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray)

(possibly the highest number recorded for this site) - MCr, GM  
**Curlew Sandpiper** - 1562, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray) (high number for this site) - MCr, GM

**Sanderling** - 17, 29/12/93, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - MCr, GM

**Red-necked Phalarope** - 1, 30/7/94, Pearce's Lake, Rottneest (Rottneest Island) - PC

**Silver Gull** - 1122, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for this site) - MCr, GM

**Common Tern** - 16, 14/1/94, Mandurah Boat Harbour (Murray) - MCr

**Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo** - 4, 27/7/94, Bungendore Park (Armada-Kelmscott) - UE

**Eastern Long-billed Corella** - 20, 6/4/94, Manning Lake, Hamilton Hill (Cockburn) - CD \* 26, 10/7/94, Manning Lake (Cockburn) - BBa, MC

**Western Long-billed Corella** - 250, 13/12/93, 3 km NW of Tonebridge (ManjimupD) - MCr

**Sulphur-crested Cockatoo** - 3, 5/1/94, Fifty Road, Baldvis (Rockingham) - MCr

**Ground Parrot** - 2, 4/8/94, Waychinicup National Park (E of Mr Manheaps) (Albany) - AN, JKR

**Mulga Parrot** - 6, 12/7/94, Barracca Nature Reserve (Chittering) (unusually far south for this species) - BB

**Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike** - 2, June 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (scarce visitor to the islands) - JF, BF

**White-breasted Robin** - 1, 30/7/94, NW of Mermaid Pt and 4 km E of Waychinicup River mouth, Waychinicup NP (Albany) (occurs only patchily in this area) - AB

**Golden Whistler** - 1, (female or uncoloured male), 15/6, 12/7 and 1/8/94, Blue Gum Lake (Melville) - JBo

**Willie Wagtail** - 1, May 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (rare vagrant to the islands) - JF, BF

**Rufous Songlark** - 3 males and 1 female, 9/11/93, 30 km NE of Manjimup (Manjimup) (uncommon in the south-west forest block) - MCr

**Brown Songlark** - 1 female, apparently of this species, 9/11/93, 22km NNE of Manjimup (Manjimup) (uncommon in the south-west forest block) - MCr (note: female Brown Songlarks are very difficult to distinguish from Rufous Songlarks; detailed notes need to be taken on colour, shape and behaviour)

**Red-winged Fairy-wren** - 1 group of at least 2-3 birds, 2/8/94, NW of Mermaid Pt, Waychinicup NP (Albany) (occurs only patchily east of Two Peoples Bay) - AB

**White-naped Honeyeater** - 1, 3/6/94, Blue Gum Lake (Melville) - JBo \* 3, 6/8/94, in garden at Kingsley (Wanneroo) - MBa (uncommon winter visitor to Swan Coastal Plain)

**Australian Magpie-lark** - 1, May 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (rare vagrant to the islands) - JF, BF

**ARID ZONE** (including the Pilbara, Gascoyne, interior and Nullabor)

**Great-billed Heron** - 1, 20/5/94, Cape Keraudren (East Pilbara) (southern most record for this species) - KC

**Pink-eared Duck** - 2 with 6 young (half length), 30/4/94, "Lake Julia", 12 km E of Binthalya HS on Mooka Station (Carnarvon) - AB

**Grey Falcon** - 1, 19/5/94, Hales Well, N of Newman (East Pilbara) - KC

**Inland Dotterel** - 1, 29/5/94, Culi Lake, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC \* 17, 29/5/94, Lake Tobin, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

**Common Redshank** - 2, 27/7/94, Pelican Point, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - AJ, RJ

**Alexandra's Parrot** - 45 in small groups, 30/5/94, between Wells 40 and 37, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

**Budgerigar** - flock of 2000, drinking at a pool, 6/94, just south of the De Grey River (East Pilbara) - SN

**Mulga Parrot** - 1, 17/6/94, Carawine Gorge, Oakover River (East Pilbara) - JM

**Chiming Wedgebill** - 1, 5/94, Well 41, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC \* 20, feeding on the ground, 17/7/94, 75 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS

**Banded Whiteface** - 4, 24/6/94, Nallan Station (Cue) - SN

**Rufous-crowned Emu-wren** - 1 +, 19/4/94, 20 km W of Neale Junction Nature Reserve on Ann Beadell Hwy (Laverton) - KC

**Rufous Treecreeper** - 1, 19/4/94, Neale Junction, Great Victoria Desert (Laverton) - KC

**Striated Grasswren** - 1 +, 19/4/94, Neale Junction (Laverton) - KC

**Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater** - 1, 5/94, Well 37, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

**Dusky Woodswallow** - 200, 17/7/94, on Butcher's Track, 50 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS \* 100, 17/7/94, 75 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS

## **KIMBERLEY**

**Letter-winged Kite** - 2, 31/7/94, Near Derby Sewage Works outfall (Derby-West Kimberley) - BB, GS

**Grey Falcon** - 1, 15/6/94, Charnley River crossing (Derby-West Kimberley) - SN

**Red-capped Plover** - 1039, 6/94, Eighty Mile Beach (Broome) - BBO

**Partridge Pigeon** - 1 +, 24/5/94, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

**Purple-crowned Fairy-wren** - 6, 25/5/94, Drysdale River crossing, Gibb River Road (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

**Black Grasswren** - 1 +, 24/5/94, Surveyor's Pool, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC \* 22 in 2.5 km, 13/6/94, Backstein Gorge, Beverley Springs Station (Derby-West Kimberley) - SN

**Black Honeyeater** - 1, 16/6/94, Ellenbrae Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - SN

**Yellow Chat** - several birds plus 3 nests, 2 with 3 eggs each, 18/6/94, Parry Lagoons (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - SN

**Gouldian Finch** - 12, 23/5/94, 10 km S of Gibb River Road and Kalumburu Road junction (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC \* 8, 3/6/94, Kangaroo Springs, Beverley Springs Station (Derby-

West Kimberley) - KC

## **ERRATA**

**Banded Stilt** - 15000 (incorrectly 1500 in WABN 70), April 94, Cargills Salt Works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG  
**Gilbert's Whistler** - 1 male, 3/4/94, Ryan's Find Road on track to Mt Walton, 13 km S of Jaurdi Station HS (Coolgardie) - HC, BM & RAOU Campout (locality incorrectly described in WABN 70)

## Observer Codes

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BBa = Bryan Barrett	MBa = Mike Bamford
BBO = Broome Bird Obs	MCr = Margery Clegg
BF = Beth Fitzhardinge	MCR = Michael Craig
BM = Bill McRoberts	PB = Pam Burgess
CD = Colin Davis	PC = Peter Coyle
GM = Glen Moore	RJ = Rose Jones
GS = George Swann	RS = Rod Smith
HC = Helen Clark	SN = Simon Nevill
JB = Jeff Burrows	SR = Sandy Rose
JBo = John Boughey	TK = Tony Kirkby
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## **Notes For Contributors**

The Editor requests contributors to note :-

- \*WABN normally only publishes material on WA birds
- \*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 December Issue**

**21 November 1994**

## Members Contributions

### FEEDING REMINDER?

On the afternoon of 17th July, whilst visiting Woodman Point, we were able to watch an adult Roseate Tern in full breeding plumage, together with an immature bird.

Both were perched on adjacent rocks within some 30 metres of where we stood. The immature bird appeared to be unsuccessfully begging for food, from time to time giving a hoarse squawk. After a while it flew across to the adult bird's rock, grabbed it by the tail feathers and gave them a tug - but still without effect.

Later the immature bird flew off over the sea and was lost to sight for a while. The adult then appeared agitated and started calling. The younger bird returned before we left but we were unable to see whether it had caught a fish during its flight.

**B. Barrett**

### SUBURBAN CATTLE EGRET

At 4 pm on Tuesday 10th May my attention was drawn to a 'large white bird' on the street verge in front of the next door neighbour's house. The bird, which I identified as a Cattle Egret, was moving rather nervously due to the number of vehicles using the street.

As I approached, it flew rather weakly to the other side of the street just missing oncoming traffic. With the help of a passer-by the bird was cornered and caught. I then took it to the relative quiet of the back garden where I examined it.

Nothing appeared to be broken and only a normal amount of feather wear was evident. However, it was very thin so I surmised that its weakness was due to lack of food.

I rang a number of groups and individuals for advice and Perry de Rebeira gave me the telephone number of the WA Native Bird Hospital where I took the bird for treatment. The bird fully recovered, was released on the 6th of July.

**P. Sandilands**

### DRINKING IN THE KIMBERLEY

While camping by a dam on Kimberley Downs Station (and drinking a reviving first cup of coffee) I noticed a small group of Crested Pigeons near the water in a small tree. It was 6 am.

One of the pigeons flew down to drink. It was quickly followed by others, some 150+, hitherto unseen. After drinking a few moments all were gone.

During 20 days in the Kimberley I did not see more than two Crested Pigeon together at any one time and most sightings, themselves infrequent, were of single birds. It seems apparent the birds gather at a similar time daily for mutual protection while drinking, presumably from over a large area.

Such flocking for protection was apparent some 5 minutes later when some 2000+ Budgerigar 'appeared'. The flock flew round and round the dam area. After many passes and lower swoops, some portion of the flock, about 20%, dropped to the waters edge or into the water to drink, those choosing the in-water method keeping their wings beating all the while.

While drinking, the time of which was three seconds or less, the remainder of the airborne flock remained overhead. The brevity of the drinking periods was presumably deter-

mined by the time the aerial group could remain above the drinkers.

This pattern repeated itself over and over to an impressive sound of beating wings and calls. Much more time was spent circling in the air than in drinking.

After some 5 to 10 minutes smaller groups of Budgerigar could be seen to leave the main body and fly off, while new flocks, some of which were several hundred strong, flew to join the large aerial group over the dam. Each new group joined at the rear of the large circling flock. The interchange of groups, all accompanied by circling and quick drinking pauses continued for over thirty minutes. By 6.35 am the aerial flock could be seen to be diminishing in size and the flocks of Budgerigars joining were noticeably smaller and less frequent.

By 6.40 am the number of the aerial flock had diminished to some 200+. These remainder then settled in a group of small trees/large shrubs (from which the Crested Pigeons had come). Incoming flocks also alighted on the same trees presumably waiting until the numbers had built up to a safe critical mass, when all again commenced to circle the dam.

The sequence was interrupted by the appearance of a Black Falcon, one of which had been observed soaring above the dam two weeks before. The circling group of Budgerigars immediately ceased to call and flew to a clump of larger trees some 250 metres away from the dam where they settled.

The Black Falcon 'cruised' about, settled in a tree briefly, made a swift shallow swoop to catch a Zebra Finch (unsuccessfully) before leaving the area as suddenly as it had appeared.

While the Black Falcon dominated the dam area, the distant flock of Budgerigar had grown again to 800+ and on the falcon departure repeated the circling, drinking procedure. Abruptly, this final flock all departed at the same time.

Over a watching period of some 50 minutes in excess of 5000 Budgerigar must have attended at the dam. It seems unlikely all could have obtained a drink. It is to be supposed that those which required fluid obtained it while the others of the individual flocks flew with them in mutual defence.

A similar phenomenon, that of waiting in a tree until numbers had grown to be of critical size was observed, though with much smaller numbers, two days later on Dampier Downs Station at a bore, where the attendant raptor was a Brown Goshawk. Interestingly also, first at the bore in the morning were Crested Pigeon, again replaced on their departure by Budgerigar.

**B. Buchanan**

### ONE TO REMEMBER

On July 5, led by George Swann, six members of the RAOU (two from NSW), visited a MRD roadside 'dam' between Broome and Derby. The 'dam', about 30 m from the road in a slight dip, has a few small bushes around it. It is surrounded by a grassland edged with trees on three sides. It held water in July.

On several occasions George had seen a Grey Falcon at the dam and had seen one take a Zebra Finch.

We waited for a Grey Falcon without success, although enjoying flocks of Zebra Finch, Budgerigar and Cockatiel which visited the water. A walk around the grassland area, dotted with trees, produced many birds including Black-tailed Treecreeper, Varied Sittella and Jacky Winter as well as a view, with a telescope, of a Brown Goshawk in a tree with its kill of Zebra Finch.

After a final scan of the trees, George and four of the group returned reluctantly to the Broome Bird Observatory. Before he left, George suggested that as we had our own vehicle it might be a good idea to wait longer as we were particularly keen to sight a Grey Falcon. This we did. We moved the car to the 'dam' side of the road to use as a hide.

After waiting a further time an Australian Hobby appeared, but it did not seem interested in the flocks of small birds. A Little Eagle was seen to take a Zebra Finch and not long after this a flock of Budgerigar flew up from the water. We had not noticed the approach of two birds, which came out of a stoop at great speed and flew over our heads. They were close enough to see the yellow cere and pale colour underneath. We watched them through binoculars fly across the road and disappear from sight, noting the light grey back and wings with dark tips. We were convinced these birds were Grey Falcon.

We settled down to wait as we were sure the 'falcons' would return to such a good food source.

While waiting a Little Eagle 'crashed' into a small leafless bush covered in Zebra Finch, though it made no catch. A few minutes later a Wedge-tailed Eagle settled on the ground near the bush.

At about 12 noon we saw two pale birds above the belt of trees flying swiftly through the trees, occasionally below the canopy — these were the falcons, we were sure.

To our great excitement the birds flew towards us and Allan was able to sight them with the telescope. Even with binoculars they were a great sight. They were Grey Falcon. All the diagnostic features were clearly seen. We watched them spiral upwards and upwards until we could no longer see them.

It was a morning we will long remember.

R. & A. Jones

## POSSIBLE BAIRD'S SANDPIPER

On 6 February, 1994, about 1 pm, Frank O'Connor and I went to Lake Cooloongup where we observed a wader which we did not recognise. Frank had binoculars and a telescope; I had binoculars (x10).

We were able to view the bird for about five minutes during which time it flew from about 30m away to about 50m away. Then it flew much further. The light was good; there was a strong westerly breeze. At first the bird was to the east of us, then to the south. The bird was with a group of about 10 Curlew Sandpipers and they were among a larger group of Red-necked Stints on a wide damp mudflat.

We both looked at the bird with binoculars and the telescope, then while Frank observed through the telescope, I wrote some notes, checking details from Frank:

*Size* — slightly smaller than Curlew Sandpiper, bigger than Red-necked Stint.

*Bill* — short, fine-ish, dark, straight.

*Base of neck feathers* — black. (This is the impression I got as the wind ruffled the feathers. Later Frank thought the neck was speckled.)

*Breast* — white.

*Eye-line* — none.

*Wing colour* — brown. Browner than Red-necked Stint or Curlew Sandpiper. (We discussed marking on the wing feathers but I wrote nothing down until later. We decided the wing feathers were not scalloped, nor spotted, not as smooth as a Curlew Sandpiper.)

*Legs* — darkish. (At first Frank said 'greenish legs', then 'darkish'.)

*Behaviour* — inclined to jump into the air, into the wind. Fast movements, hyperactive style.

This is all that was written at the time; The bird flew once, we observed it again for a short time, then it flew out of sight, both times with the Curlew Sandpipers although it had been behaving differently to them most of the time. Despite walking further and searching as we returned the bird was not seen again.

Later I asked, "Do you think the bill was as long as the head?" Frank said, "Definitely shorter. It seemed about half the length of a Curlew Sandpiper bill".

At home I tried to find an illustration of the plumage in *Shorebirds* for which we had not found the words. The closest match, showing dark centres to the feathers, was a Baird's Sandpiper. Although we did not note the comparative wing/tail length or any circular movement of the tail while feeding, all of our observations except the straight bill seemed to fit that species and the bill was at the time being compared to those of Curlew Sandpiper.

When I realized that the bird may have been a Baird's Sandpiper I made a note, additional to the above, that the bird tended to hold its neck vertically in relation to the ground.

B. Newbey

Reference: Hayman P, Marchant J, Prater T, (1986) *Shorebirds, An identification guide to waders of the world*. Croom Helm, London and Sydney.

## LATE NESTING ROBIN

Although the Western Yellow Robin is a fairly common bird, little is known about its breeding biology. Storr (1991) gives the breeding season as mid-July until early December. On 10th January 1994 I discovered a nest of the species containing two eggs in jarrah forest 27.5km NE of Manjup. The eggs hatched on 22nd January and at the time of writing the chicks are growing rapidly. In addition I also observed a pair of Western Yellow Robin feeding young on 20th January in a nest about 500m from the first one.

Margery Clegg informed me that she had observed evidence of breeding in eight species at Cowaramup in mid-January this year. It will be interesting to determine whether the robins regularly breed this late in the area or whether this year is just unusually conducive to late breeding.

M. Craig

Reference: Storr GM (1991) *Birds of the South-West Division of Western Australia*, Records of the WA Museum, Supplement No 35, WA Museum.

Simpson K. & Day N. (1984) *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Lloyd O'Neill, Victoria and Beruldsen G. (1980) *A Field guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, Rigby Publishers, Adelaide both give January as a breeding month for Western Yellow Robin. (Ed.)

## OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Much of the current success of the WA Group is due to its large band of enthusiastic volunteers. They seem capable of trying and succeeding at anything you care to mention. Your elected committee, voted in each year at the AGM, are of course volunteers and it goes without saying they are essential for the viability of the group. But as well as these more 'significant' volunteers, there are a host of members who perform tasks which may seem ordinary, but which help to make the RAOU

such a good Group with which to be associated.

The office volunteers do a fine job each morning, five days a week, throughout the year, but do you know who they are? or how many?

There are at least twenty. Each morning Monday to Friday one office volunteer is rostered to be in our office in Perry House, a rather splendid National Heritage building at Perry Lakes.

All sorts of questions crop up on the telephone — from prospective members wanting information about bird outings or monthly meetings and persons wanting to know which book to buy, to requests for help in identifying a bird in a garden.

Some calls are from overseas or interstate visitors wanting to know the best birding spots and do we have anyone free or willing to take them out? There are those more adventurous people who actually arrive in person to see what goes on, to look at the books, videos, cards and items which are for sale or maybe have a cup of coffee and a chat. But the important thing to remember, is that it is office volunteers who perform this very worthwhile function of presenting the RAOU to the community in Western Australia.

We should raise our glasses to them.

M. Bailey

## Notices

### BIRD DISPLAY

The RAOU WA Group is steadily building up a series of thematic displays to be mounted in public places. The aim is to extend the joys of bird appreciation, knowledge and notions about their conservation, well beyond our RAOU membership. WABN No 70 June 1994 listed two displays:

1. Threatened Birds of Western Australia
2. How to Attract Birds to your Garden.

To these, the following have now been added:

3. Enraptured with Raptors
4. In Praise of Penguins
5. Parenting in the Bird World
6. Australia - A Paradise of Parrots.

More thematic displays will be developed in future.

In general, a "Birdwatching around \_\_\_" (local district around the library etc) display is mounted first, to whet viewers' appetites. Displays are prepared especially for each area. Any of the other above listed displays can then follow, hopefully helping to extend the general public's interest in the fascinating world of birds.

If you would like to see these displays in your area please contact your local librarian about the matter. If reception is good, ask them to contact Judy Blyth (our Education/Publicity person) to make arrangements — telephone (09) 381 6293.

### EDUCATION MATERIAL WANTED

The Western Australian Museum has just opened a new bird gallery. We are in the process of collecting items for a 'hands-on' basket of bird items for visiting students to handle. We have a small number of bird nests, some taxidermied bird specimens and a tape of bird calls. I would like to add other items to the basket and I am hoping that readers of WABN may be able to help. we should like to receive: —

*Nests* of all types; *Bones* — we would very much like a big pelican bone or ones from an Emu, as well as small bird bones;

*Skulls; Feathers.* All of the material needs to be suitable for children to handle.

Finally, anyone who finds a dead bird in good condition is welcome to give it to us. The bird gallery has been made from donated specimens such as road kills or aviary specimens. This means not all species found on the Swan Coastal Plain are represented. Birds will be added as they become available. Please wrap the fresh birds in wet newspaper, place in a plastic bag and freeze.

All such items could be brought to RAOU meetings to be passed on or sent direct to Education Services, WA Museum.

M Turpin, Education Officer

### WA GROUP LIBRARY

Members are invited to visit the Group Library and browse through the many reference books, field guides and reports. The latest acquisitions are Volumes 1 and 2 of *HANZAB*. There are also some good books and video cassettes available on loan and these in particular will assist new members in learning how to identify birds more easily.

Journals and newsletters are received regularly from various organisations involved in caring for the environment and those received recently are:-

*Urban Bushland Strategy* — draft plan

*Dryandra Management Plan*

*Burrup Peninsula* — planning exercise on proposed development including industrial zone

*RAOU Conservation Notes* — summary of the RAOU Scientific Day held recently in Adelaide

*RGC Wetlands Centre, Capel - June 1994 Report and Catalogue of Technical Reports 1994*

*Fire Review Panel — Report March 1994* - review of CALM prescribed burning policy and practices and wildfire threat analysis

*RAOU Conservation Notes No. 15* - concentrated mainly on wetlands

*Broome Bird Observatory* - minutes 27 June 1994, Wardens report June 1994 and July 1994 newsletter

*World Heritage Newsletter* - produced by CALM

*Bold Park* - land use strategy.

Further detail of Library acquisitions will be included in later editions of WABN.

## Hooded Plover Project

This is the first report on the HPP. Members from 7 centres have responded to a call for District Co-ordinators. Reports of sightings are beginning to arrive at the RAOU office from throughout the target area.

Birdwatchers in two country areas have formed local groups for regular birdwatching outings as a result of the HPP. The number of such country groups is on the increase — a healthy sign for the RAOU.

The project depends entirely on the efforts of members regularly checking their areas and forwarding reports of sightings.

The reports will provide Mike Weston with the information to prepare a statement on the status of the Hooded Plover in Western Australia.

Do not hesitate to contact Phyllis Bentley and her team at the Office for any information or help.

A. Jones

## Taxonomy re-visited

Taxonomy, used wisely, can be a source of information, interest and usefulness to all bird observers. Many RAOU members are interested in the relationships of Australian birds, both in terms of relationships between Australian species and relationships to species occurring in other countries. It therefore surprised us to see the point of view expressed by one member in the lead article of the last WABN (No 69).

We agree that it would be unwise and premature at this point to suddenly change to a system of classification based entirely on DNA-DNA hybridisation before such ideas were more fully tested using other DNA techniques as well as traditional morphological approaches. However, just because these new techniques provide new insights into bird relationships is not a reason to abandon such a useful system for one which is entirely arbitrary and subjective, ie by alphabetical ordering according to common name. One advantage of arrangement of field guides according to a classification with an evolutionary basis is that related, and therefore similar, birds are placed near each other. This assists not only in identification but also in understanding evolutionary and bio-geographic relationships. For example under an alphabetic system the Yellow White-eye and Silvereye would be well separated, thus hindering identification. Under any past, current or proposed system of 'natural' classification, these species would be placed close to each other. The suggestion that, within an alphabetic arrangement, 'groupings' such as cuckoos, kingfishers, etc could be used simply adds to confusion by introducing groups in an arbitrary (alphabetic) arrangement. How would it be determined which species were placed in each such group? Different opinions on this matter would result in different groupings. Would such decisions be based on accepted taxonomic relationships, and if so, what would be the advantage over the present system? Consideration of this question suggests that arbitrary groupings would add markedly to any existing confusion. The optimal solution is to use the best available information to get as close as possible to 'true' relationships. Inevitably, this will result in some changes as knowledge progresses, but such an approach will still contain more information and be more useful than an entirely arbitrary approach.

Books such as HANZAB are not field guides — they are designed to accurately and effectively communicate information about the known biology of the birds of a region, including information on their known or presumed relationships. They are therefore logically organised within a taxonomic framework. With respect to the better field guides, we see no evidence that there has been a 'tyrannical' use of taxonomy. Good field guides are designed to facilitate accurate identification in the field; at the same time, they can also communicate other information for those people (presumably the majority) whose interests go beyond simply putting a name on a bird or 'ticking' it on a list.

**A. Burbidge & J. Blyth**

*B. Buchanan responds: The essential point of my article was to draw attention to the fact that taxonomy is not only subjective and arbitrary (admitted by its practitioners) but subject to continuous change. The Introduction to Emu Vol 77 Supplement May 1978 says "...it is theoretically possible to*

*devise a set of names for use throughout the English-speaking world that, once established by consensus, need not be changed" (my emphasis). The current system which renders references and field guides out of date every few years may be good for the publishers, but is frustrating and irritating for the majority of bird observers. I find it difficult to accept that the alphabet is "entirely arbitrary and subjective" while I recognised that "a strict alphabetical order ...might not always be the most convenient". I retain considerable doubt that taxonomic order is of much significance for the "majority".*

Editors note: Other written and verbal comment received on the 'tyranny of taxonomy' favoured a reconsideration of the current taxonomic approach.

— and further follow-up —

### CORELLA FLYWAY

No sooner had the piece on corella flyway been published in WABN No. 70 June 1994, than I observed two Little Corella flying north in July. The exception proving the rule? Usual southern passage has resumed (August).

### MAXIMISING BREEDING SUCCESS

Doubts as to the universal applicability of natural selection to the explanation of bird behaviour must surely have been strengthened by the observation of Galah repeatedly sliding down a playground slide (see *Wingspan* No. 14 June 1994 p36).

B. Buchanan

## B B C B Q

- 1) What weight of insects per hectare are taken annually by birds from healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 2) What proportion of the total insects present are taken by birds in healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 3) What percentage of birds are to found in open pasture in comparison with healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 4) Are Malleefowl largely vegetarian or insectivorous ?
- 5) Why would you not study Malleefowl food intake by a study of their droppings or excretions ?
- 6) Have Malleefowl been recorded as significantly increasing in the SW of WA at any recent time ?
- 7) What is uncommon about the singing of paired Australian Magpie-larks ?
- 8) Is there evidence that birds sleep in flight ?
- 9) How many species of honeyeater (*Meliphagidae*) are in Australia ?
- 10) How many species of honeyeater (*Meliphagidae*) are known worldwide ?

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