

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 74 June 1995

SALT, SWEAT AND SWEET SATISFACTION

Banding Hooded Plovers at Lake Gore, Esperance in 1995

I can still remember my disappointment as we walked over the low dune and got our first view of the famous Lake Gore. The lake is near Esperance and it is the site where over 1600 Hooded Plovers had been counted only weeks before. Jack Ewart, a local ornithologist who had generously offered to guide us into "Hoodie" territory, stood beside me and said "Oh, dear". In fact I think he said it twice. The flat looked lifeless, and we all peered silently through our binoculars at the birdless expanse of salt. All seemed to be lost. I had travelled across the country to research Western Australian Hooded Plovers, and luck had not been going my way.

I turned my gaze along the salt-flat. It was then that I noticed a small group of "Hoodies" roosting by the water's edge. There was at least 30 birds; what a relief! But as I scanned further in that direction, there was another group, then another, and another. I was now more than relieved, I was excited. There were hundreds of Hooded Plovers here, not quite 1600, but still plenty to study. I suspect Jack was secretly relieved as well. He had advised us to hurry to Lake Gore, and to band as many birds as we could, as quickly as we could. The lake was drying, and the birds were almost certainly ready to leave. There was no time to waste. We set camp, and set our first trap line.

We had brought a type of trap called a "noose mat". These traps have only been used on Hooded Plovers in Tasmania, and with limited success. Nevertheless, I felt it was the only workable way of catching Hooded Plovers. They are very simple, and simply consist of a mat with three rows of nooses made from fishing line. The idea is that the birds walk across the mat and entangle their legs. In this circumstance, we were using no bait. Instead we relied on a technique known as twinkling. Simply put, twinkling is to birds as mustering is to cattle, although the former requires a lot more stealth. Fortunately, "Hoodies" are easy to twinkle by avian standards, and it was not long before a flock approached and crossed the first trap line.

We caught four beautiful Hooded Plovers. A wonderful start, considering it was our first afternoon's work. The birds were aggressive in the hand, and every now and then one would bite the bander or assistant. Unfortunately for the birds, their bite drew no blood, and caused absolutely no pain! We measured and banded the birds, and released them in a healthy and strong condition.

The next day was not as productive as we had hoped. We worked from dawn to dusk and only caught two birds. Once again I began to worry. Would we ever make our goal of 50 birds. We thought about what went wrong, we discussed it, and we formed a plan. We moved the trap line to a low sand ridge, and turned the line into a cross! We staggered the traps, instead of having an unbroken line. We waited until the afternoon. Then it happened, we had found the formula! Six Hooded Plovers were caught before dark. But the middle of the next day was fruitless and none was captured. This is despite the best twinkle I have ever seen; Jack Ewart moved about 900 "Hoodies" around 750m, but just as they approached the traps they flew off! Disaster! Once again we gave up until later in the day when another successful period before dark set us thinking. Could it be that dawn and dusk were the best time to twinkle the birds over the traps? The short answer proved to be "yes" and we had cracked the code!

The next few days brought catches of seven, eight and 10 "Hoodies", then the following two days produced an unbelievable 20 birds per day! On two occasions we had to cover the traps because we had too many birds to process. We had passed 50, and our sights had now fixed on 100 birds, the upper limit of my CALM permit. Within a few days we had achieved our goal and we had banded 100 Hooded Plovers! We had also finished just in time, as rain associated with cyclonic activity forced us away from the lake only days after the end of banding! It was clear that my luck had changed, as circumstances had allowed us to band 100 birds.

We did not manage this feat alone. I would like to thank

Jack and Kate Ewart and John and Janelle Hynde for all their expertise, encouragement, help, hospitality and equipment. We could not have done this without them. The rest of the Esperance Bird Group was an invaluable help. I don't know what we would have done without the extra hands and enthusiasm, and I am so glad that most of you got a close look at a Hooded Plover. The cold drinks and ice were wonderful! Thanks to Kate Dawson for organising the volunteers. The Hooded Plover Sub-Committee provided fantastic count information, and was a great support in general. If there is anyone I have forgotten to thank, please forgive me. I ask all counters, and any new volunteers, to assist the ongoing Hooded Plover Project. Remember that it is a project of national significance.

Finally, I ask you all to remember one thing — **if you see a Hooded Plover in Western Australia, look to see if it has a metal leg band.** To my knowledge, the only banded Hooded Plovers in the state are the result of our expedition to Lake Gore. Therefore any banded bird has almost certainly come from Lake Gore.

Mike Weston

WANTED

Wardens for RAOU Eyre Bird Observatory

Resourceful couple would enjoy this challenge

For details see page 13

Observations

Compiled by the Observations Committee. Shires are in brackets.

Names and order follow Christidis, L. and Boles, W. (1994) *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. RAOU Monograph 2.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Malleefowl - 2, 10/1/95, 36 km east of Jerramungup (Jerramungup) - JS, HS * 1, 25/1/95, Great Eastern Highway just east of Kambalda turnoff (Coolgardie) - UE

Southern Giant Petrel - 1, 31/1/95, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 1, 8/2/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (these are both early records for this species)

Kerguelen Petrel - 40, 26/10/93, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Salvin's/Antarctic/Slender-billed/Broad-billed Prions - 2, 27/7/93, Bunker Bay (Busselton) - RP * 20, 15/9/93, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 3, 6/6/94, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (Note: prions can be difficult to distinguish even in the hand unless both age and sex are determined independently)

Fairy Prion - 15, 12/1/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 100+, 8/2/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough

(Busselton) - RP (unusual at this time of year; largest numbers and earliest dates for the west coast; possibly non-breeders or immatures)

White-chinned Petrel - a number of records from the Dunsborough area including: 3, 27/7/93, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 1, 27/7/93, Bunker Bay (Busselton) - RP * 1, 28/8/93, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 3, 17/9/93, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 1, 9/10/93, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 1, 24/5/94, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 2, 18/6/94, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Yellow-nosed Albatross - 2, 26/6/94, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Little Egret - 47, 14/2/95, Creery wetlands, near Creery Island (Murray) - MS * 21, 6/3/95, Lake Joondalup (Wanneroo) - GL (high counts for this species in the south-west)

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 6/3/95, Lake Monger (Perth) - DS * 1, 4/95, Booragoon Lake (Melville) - GM

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 2, 17/3/95, Creery Island (Murray) - MS

Spotted Harrier - 1, young bird, 25/2/95 and 17/4/95, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - TK

Wedge-tailed Eagle - 2, 25/2/95 and 17/4/95, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - TK * 4 flying together, 18/3/95, Keysbrook (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) - JS, HS

Peregrine Falcon - 2, 5/2/95, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, GM * 1, 15/4/95, Dawesville cut (Mandurah) - CD

Painted Button-quail - 2, 25/1/95, Canal Rocks Road, Yallingup (Busselton) - RP

Bar-tailed Godwit - 3, 25/2/95, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - TK

Whimbrel - 1, 24/2/95, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP

Pectoral Sandpiper - 12, 5/2/95, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, GM (high count for this species in WA)

Red-necked Phalarope - 1, 26/3/95, Lake Baghdad, Rottnest Island (Rottnest) - JO, SO * 1, 21/4/95, Lake Baghdad, Rottnest Island (Rottnest) - SN

Banded Lapwing - 2 adults and 4 fledglings, 27/1/95, Kwinana Beach Road adjacent to CSBP works (Kwinana) - MS

Pomarine Jaeger - 1, 19/2/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Arctic Jaeger - 1, 19/2/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Caspian Tern - 41, 17/3/95, Serpentine River mouth, Peel Inlet (Murray) - MS

(Eastern) Long-billed Corella - 25, 16/11/94, Pt Walter (Melville) - PS

Crimson Rosella - 1, presumed aviary escapee, being pursued by a Peregrine Falcon, 15/3/95, Morley (Bayswater) - HvW

Barking Owl - 1, 17/2/95, Sugarloaf Road, (near Cape Naturaliste) - RP

Fork-tailed Swift - 1, 19/2/95, Lake McLarty (Murray) - LH and RAOU excursion * 7, 9/4/95, Star Swamp (Stirling) - HvW, DP

Variegated Fairy-wren - 3, 2/2/95, Lake Joondalup (Wanneroo) - NH

Red Wattlebird - 100+, 15-16/4/95, moving north across the Dawesville cut in the early morning (Mandurah) - CD

Grey Currawong - 4, 27/1/95, McLaughlan Rd, The Spectacles (Kwinana) - MS (uncommon on the Swan Coastal Plain)

Zebra Finch - 2 (one male, one female), 16/3/95, Pemberton (Manjimup) - BB (probable aviary escapees)

White-backed Swallow - 14, 17/4/95, Barrett-Lennard Lake (3 km N of Beermullah Lake) (Gingin) - BB

ARID ZONE (including the Pilbara, Gascoyne, interior and Nullarbor)

Banded Stilt - 15000 pairs nesting in several colonies, early April 1995, Lake Ballard (Menzies) - JL * 4/95, nesting at Lake Barlee (Menzies) - REJ

Double-banded Plover - 2, 28/3/95, on beach, Eyre Bird Observatory (Dundas) - EBO

Black-fronted Dotterel - 1, 21/3/95 and 3/4/95, on beach, Eyre Bird Observatory (Dundas) - EBO

Hooded Plover - 2, 9/4/95, Goongarrie, on a salt lake near the National Park (Menzies) - TK * 2 pairs each with 2 eggs, ca. 15/4/95, small lakes adjacent to Lake Deborah West, near Bullfinch (Yilgarn) - RAOU excursion

KIMBERLEY

Magpie Goose - 60 birds and 25 nests, 18/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM

Pink-eared Duck - 8 adult birds and 6 ducklings, 25/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM (few breeding reports from the Kimberley)

Hardhead - 1000, 18/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM (generally uncommon in the Kimberley)

Great Crested Grebe - 5, Taylors Lagoon, ca. 80 km E of Broome (Broome) - BBO, GS (rare in the Kimberley)

Glossy Ibis - 230, 18/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM

Letter-winged Kite - 1, 30/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - RC

Baillon's Crake - 1, 28/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CS, RC

Little Button-quail - 3, 25/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

Red-chested Button-quail - 1, 4/1/95, Kununurra sewage ponds (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO, FS, JBe, KB * 2, 6/1/95, beside Packsaddle Plains Road, near Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO, FS, JBe, KB * 1, 30/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - RC (few records in the Kimberley)

Common Redshank - 8, 14/4/95, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - TD

Grey-tailed Tattler - 3000, 19/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM (very high count for this species)

Ruddy Turnstone - 303, 9/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

Asian Dowitcher - 103, 9/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (high count for this species)

Black-winged Stilt - 5000, with hundreds nesting, 18/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM

Red-kneed Dotterel - 8 adults and 6 chicks, 22/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (few breeding records in the Kimberley)

Whiskered Tern - 1500, most nesting, 18/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM

White-winged Black Tern - 1500, 23/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

Flock Bronzewing - 1, 8/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - TD

Fork-tailed Swift - 300, 21/2/95, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO

Yellow Chat - 5, 23/3/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM
Lemon-bellied (Kimberley) Flycatcher - 1, 30/10/94, in Melaleuca thicket on Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (this species is normally only found in mangroves)

Leaden Flycatcher - 2, 6/4/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - JP

OBSERVERS

BB = Bruce Buchanan

BBO = Broome Bird Observatory

CD = Colin Davis

CM = Clive Minton

CS = Clinton Schipper

DP = Dorothy Pearce

DS = Dee Smith

EBO = Eyre Bird Observatory

FO = Frank O'Connor

GL = Graeme Little

GM = George Miller

GS = George Swann

HS = Helen Start

HvW = Hank van Wees

JL = Jim Lane

JO = John O'Malley

JP = John Pridham

JS = John Start

MS = Marcus Singor

NH = Neil Hamilton

PS = Peter Sandilands

RC = Rohan Clarke

REJ = Ron Johnstone

RP = Ross Payton

SN = Simon Nevill

SO = Sue O'Malley

TD = Tom Delaney

TK = Tony Kirkby

UE = Una Edwards

RAOU Office WA

Telephone

Birding Hotline

Chairman

Joint Editors

Perry House, 71 Oceanic Drive,
Wembley 6014

or

PO Box 199, Jolimont 6014

(09) 383 7749

(09) 387 8412

B Wilson, 46 Farrant Street,
Gooseberry Hill, 6076

Tel. (09) 293 1094

John Blyth

Tel. (09) 405 5100 (w)

Tel. (09) 381 6293 (h)

Fax. (09) 306 1641 (w)

Allan Burbidge

Tel. (09) 405 5109 (w)

Fax. (09) 306 1641 (w)

Tel/Fax (09) 306 1642 (h)

Notes for Contributors

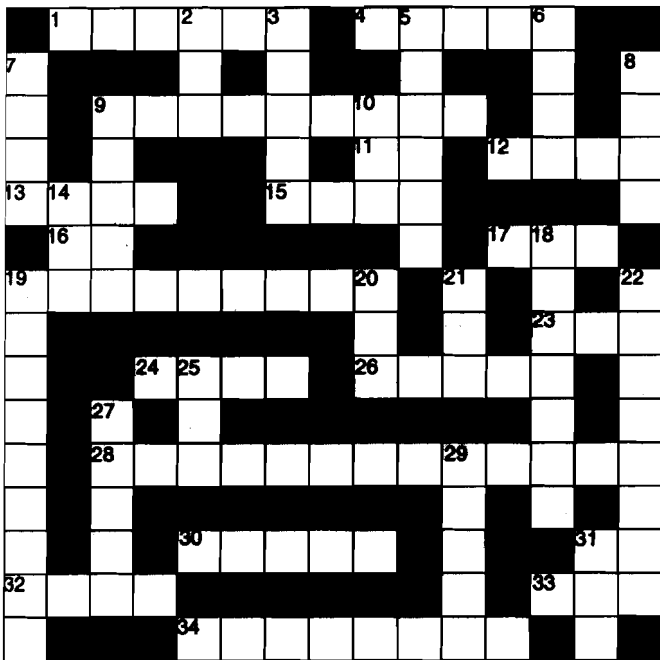
The Editors request contributors to note:

- WABN publishes material of interest to the WA Group
- contributions should be written or typed with **double spacing**
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary

Deadline for the September Issue

**1 August 1995
at Perry House**

Crossword



ACROSS

1. Long-toed bird of the tropics.
4. Graceful white bird of the wetlands.
9. Shy bird of the forests with a loud, clear, ringing call.
11. Finch, minus the head and long tail!
12. Chats are commonly found in these areas.
13. A diminutive bird with a long tail is likely to be one of these.
15. If it's a Reeve, it isn't one!
16. Keen birdwatchers.
17. As a beginner, it is wise to do this if you want further information.
19. Wilson's Storm Petrel breeds in this area.
23. It's winged and warm-blooded but definitely not a bird.
24. A Masked Lapwing has one, though it's not as useful as a cowboy's.
26. Long, lacy feather developed by the Egret during the breeding season.
28. This quality of the Crested Bellbird's song sometimes makes it difficult to locate.
30. A Lyrebird is well-known for its ability to do this.
31. If you have a bird in your hand, you have a good chance of identifying it, but if the head and tail disappear, you'll be left with this small word only!
32. If you happen to be a Rainbow Bee-eater, this is prime real estate.
33. In most cases, it is oval in shape.
34. A young bird, wearing its first plumage of true feathers.

DOWN

2. Pelicans will often use warm currents of this to soar to great heights.
3. This call signifies a warning.
5. Spectacular high diver at sea.
6. A vulture may do this to remove meat from a carcass.
7. Probably a beginner's term for *Corvus coronoides*.
8. Cramped cubby for dedicated birdwatchers.
9. Erectile feathers on a bird's head.
10. For a sea-bird, this could mean big trouble.
14. Young Dotterels will do this very well, rather than fly.
18. Many of the waders in WA head for this remote location each autumn.
19. Said to be an omen of good luck by mariners.
20. A Scarlet Robin owns a white one.
21. Title of the RAOU's scientific journal.
22. One is likely to meet a sudden end if it attempts to cross the Nullarbor into WA.
25. A female swan.
27. Pertaining to birds.
29. Ground-dwelling bird which prefers to run rather than fly.
31. Recapture of banded birds may give some indication of this.

The crossword solution is provided at the end of these notes.

Members' Contributions

DATABASE OF WA BIRDS — ANNUAL REPORT (formerly known as the National Parks Project)

The number of cards (lists) sent in to the office has increased markedly over the past year and covers many locations for which there were previously no records in the database. A continuing problem is the number of cards that arrive without dates on them — this is essential information — or names and addresses of contributors so that replacement cards can be sent out or unusual records checked. For remote sites, the latitude and longitude is a great help to those responsible for the input of data.

At the end of summer 1995, over 104,000 records had been entered into the computer database covering 443 species at 334 sites. Last year's National Parks Project Report (WABN No. 69) included information on the number of records the database held for the Malleefowl. Since then another 41 records have been added, doubling the total. However, 38 of these were from Eyre Bird Observatory and the Nuytsland Nature Reserve — a stronghold for the species and subject to regular observation. The remaining three records were from Kalbarri National Park, Buntine Nature Reserve and Yilgarn Shire (Southern Cross). The indications are that it is still not a regularly recorded species.

Among the 443 species currently recorded in the database are a number that have less than 10 sightings recorded. These are listed below to encourage all members who contribute to the project to keep a special lookout for them and include them on the lists that they send in. Pelagic seabirds and migratory waders have not been included.

Atlas No.	Species Name	No. of Sightings
006	Orange-footed Scrubfowl	1
198	Cape Barren Goose	8
098	Black-faced Cormorant	9
184	Great-billed Heron	4
195	Little Bittern	5
197	Australasian Bittern	9
234	Pacific Baza	3
233	Letter-winged Kite	8
220	Grey Goshawk	6
238	Black Falcon	7
052	White-browed Crake	9
047	Chestnut Rail	2
013	Red-backed Button-quail	1
015	Chestnut-backed Button-quail	5
170	Painted Snipe	2
981	Kelp Gull	1
120	Sooty Tern	5
122	Common Noddy	9
123	Lesser Noddy	8
033	Emerald Dove	3
040	Partridge Pigeon	5
021	Rose-crowned Fruit-dove	3
026	Pied Imperial Pigeon	3
303	Scarlet-chested Parrot	4
311	Ground Parrot	6
336	Oriental Cuckoo	5
347	Common Koel	8
348	Channel-billed Cuckoo	8
247	Rufous Owl	1
252	Grass Owl	1
334	White-throated Needletail	1
324	Forest Kingfisher	1
354	Rainbow Pitta	1
528	Rufous-crowned Emu-wren	7
518	Black Grasswren	2
513	Striated Grasswren	4
512	Thick-billed Grasswren	3
457	Large-billed Gerygone	2
458	Green-backed Gerygone	8
480	Slaty-backed Thornbill	6
469	Banded Whiteface	2
607	White-lined Honeyeater	2
599	Grey Honeyeater	4
379	Lemon-bellied Flycatcher	2
388	Mangrove Robin	9
439	Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush	7
440	Nullarbor Quail-thrush	1
413	Little Shrike-thrush	9
372	Shining Flycatcher	8
673	Spangled Drongo	7
429	Cicadabird	3
431	Varied Triller	8
672	Yellow Oriole	8
545	White-browed Woodswallow	4
658	Yellow-rumped Mannikin	7
670	Gouldian Finch	6
523	Tawny Grassbird	5
969	Zitting Cisticola	1
TOTAL SPECIES with less than 10 sightings in database (12.98%)		58

Any members who are interested in collating and keying information into the database are invited to contact the Office Manager and joint co-ordinator, Max Bailey. For more information on the Database of WA Birds Project contact the office. Detailed enquiries can be addressed to the co-ordinators who are usually in the office on Wednesday and Thursday mornings.

Peter Sandilands and Max Bailey
Database of WA Birds Project Co-ordinators

ARE THE MAGPIES "IN THE KNOW"?

This year in mid January the Western Magpie arrived in large flocks both on the coastal plain and in the hills. On 15 February there were 95 Western Magpies feeding on the road at 5.30 am over a 1 km stretch on the road just east of Kalamunda.

It is not usual to see such large flocks at this time of the year. Are they escaping from drier areas? The rainfall however has been reasonable apart from the coastal strip to which they have come. Are they getting ready for early breeding? Do they "know" something that we humans do not?

Mary Bremner

WHITE-FRONTED HONEYEATER AT DOBADERRY NATURE RESERVE

As part of a banding project in the Beverley/West Dale area, we were mist netting and banding birds in the Dobaderry Nature Reserve (65 km south-east of Perth, 35 km south-west of Beverley) during February 1995. The habitat in the area was wandoo woodland with some dense *Dryandra* sp./*Gastrolobium* sp. scrubland. On one particular round of net checking, we were surprised to find a White-fronted Honeyeater in the net. With somewhat similar looking species such as Tawny-crowned, New Holland and White-cheeked Honeyeaters also in the net or more regularly in the area, it was not until we noticed the red skin behind the eye that we realised it was a White-fronted Honeyeater.

Having not previously recorded White-fronted's in the Beverley/West Dale area and having associated them more with the arid and semi-arid parts of the state, we wondered if this bird may reflect another recent occurrence of a south-western or coastwards movement by some arid zone birds in response to low rainfall experienced further inland, as referred to by Mike Bamford in his recent article on Black Honeyeaters (WABN No. 73: March 1995).

Anthony Bougher and Peter Congreve

FLESH-FOOTED SHEARWATERS NEAR MANDURAH

A visit to the sea-wall on the south side of the Dawesville cut at about 3.00 pm on 4 March revealed a large flock (60+) of Flesh-footed Shearwaters very close to the shore. It was a warm afternoon with only a light breeze.

Several groups of fisherfolk and a couple of boats were presumably attracted to the same school of fish as the birds which were sitting, squabbling and diving in the vicinity of the fishing lines. Unfortunately, this resulted in several getting snared and hooked, but once they got used to being held, the birds seemed reasonably resigned while the frustrated fishermen disentangled them.

Interestingly, one group which threw rocks at the birds to discourage them was rewarded by attracting and ultimately catching more of them!

The closest birds were less than 10 m from the breakwater, so the distinguishing features were easily seen — overall chocolate brown colour, paler tips to underwings, pink bill with dark tip, pale pink legs shorter than the slightly rounded square tail. The long elegant wings and graceful flight were wonderful to watch.

A group of 10-12 Sanderlings loafing on the higher rocks of the breakwater seemed oblivious to the excitement.

John and Hilary Brooke

BEACH-WASHED FLESH-FOOTED SHEARWATERS

On the morning on 10 March Charlie and I were walking along Goode Beach when we came across about 20 dead Flesh-footed Shearwaters scattered along the first kilometre of beach. There may have been more along the second part of the beach, but they were definitely Flesh-footed Shearwaters, not Petrels, as was reported in *The Albany Advertiser*.

There is a difference of opinion as to why they should appear as we are told they do every year at about this time. We have been here for only about 20 months, but there was certainly a large number last year, too.

One theory is that they starve as a result of the shortage of fish. Another is that the mulie fishermen kill them when they interfere with their fishing. A third is that they become exhausted when flying into a headwind, and when diving after fish are unable to take off and thus drown. We had very high winds a week or so before.

We collected a fresh carcass and took it into the museum that morning, but so far have not heard the result of any examination.

Elizabeth Davies

THE BEACH PATROL SCHEME

In the December 1991 issue of *Wingspan* it was announced that the RAOU would start an exciting new project in which anyone could participate. Knowledge of our 'seabirds' is limited due to lack of opportunity, identification problems and the difficulties of observation at sea.

Regular patrolling of our beaches for dead or dying seabirds has proved to be an effective and rewarding pursuit. Up to 14 species have been added to the continental Australian list by this method. It follows therefore that the gathering of such data is a valuable and important task that can contribute to long-term environmental monitoring and short-term pollution control.

With the above in mind, a number of selected members living near or within easy access to our coasts were asked to set up their own groups to walk their local beaches from time to time throughout the winter months. We hoped to cover some of the accessible areas between Port Hedland and Esperance. The two Bird Observatories had already set up their own systems.

The scheme allows for:

- an increased chance of banded birds being recovered;
- the opportunity to increase the collections of seabirds in museums;

- the provision of specimens for the study of parasites, moult and diet;

- the chance for patrollers to learn to identify species of seabirds.

Anyone with an interest in seabirds can be a patroller. We ask people interested to either contact us through the RAOU office or their local organiser. Although monthly visits are desirable, opportunistic visits to rarely patrolled beaches are encouraged. Members interested in the scheme will be issued with a kit. Specimens collected are to be handed over to either the ornithological department of the Western Australian Museum for Ron Johnstone's attention, or to the local museum.

"a completely unknown species was collected"

Since the December 1991 issue a further request has been made for the collection of specimens of cuttlefish. This later request came from the Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association and has the blessing of the RAOU. One of the objects of the SOSSA is the study of species of albatross and in particular the Wandering Albatross at present under threat from long-line fishing. Their diet is chiefly cephalopods, cuttlefish and squid. Cephalopods generally have a short life. They grow to maturity over two years, breed and die. All cuttlefish species and many squid float to the surface when they die and form the staple diet for many seabirds. The biomass available from this source is huge and a lot comes from Australian waters.

In an attempt to gain more information about cuttlefish in Australian waters, how it changes over time, and its distribution, patrollers are asked to collect specimens. It appears that there are many species of cuttlefish, etc, in our waters — in fact, a completely unknown species was collected on one of the Albany beaches in 1994 by Liz and Charlie Davies.

Dr C C Lu of the Museum of Victoria, Russell Street, Melbourne and Curator of Invertebrate Zoology is co-ordinator of this study and specimens should be forwarded to him.

Bryan Barrett

WADER MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

While reading the latest edition of *The Tattler*, which is the newsletter of the Australian Wader Study Group, it became evident to me that most of the States were involved in this study, with the notable exception of Western Australia. We had done so in the early 80s, but no serious effort has since been made.

To attempt to rectify this lapse I put a proposal before our Committee, which they have accepted.

This, therefore, is the proposal in broad outline. Further details will be published in the next issue of *WA Bird Notes*:

Many of our lakes, swamps and estuaries have been designated as areas of national and international importance to one or another species of wader. In addition, we have numerous wetlands which attract these birds. It is proposed to cover as many of these as possible during the year to



ascertain the species present and their numbers.

This study will hopefully involve many members and give them a worthwhile project in which to participate. We will be looking at a period of at least the next three years, possibly longer.

Bryan Barrett

NEST RECORDING

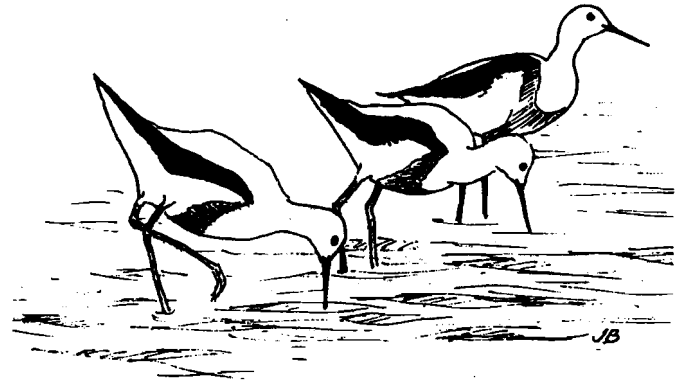
During the recent Easter camp-out held at Ennuin Station north of Bullfinch, some of the adjacent wetlands were investigated. In one such area three or more Hooded Plover were seen and two nests located. One nest held two eggs, covered by a sitting bird. This nest was photographed for the records of the Hooded Plover Project. No harm in that — if that was all that had happened.

Unfortunately, others (not unnaturally) took the opportunity to approach the nest and other photographers were seen near the nest.

The following afternoon a second party was taken to the area but was not able to find any trace of the plover. The nest had been deserted and the eggs were cold.

The moral of the story is that if members find nests while in a group, please keep the information to yourselves. By all means tell the group leader or, if present, the member responsible for the Nest Record Scheme. But please do not tell the whole group of your find.

Bryan Barrett



CYCLONE BOBBY

Banded Stilts are present in the Creery wetlands, especially during the summer and autumn months, and numbers often build up to many thousands.

When Cyclone Bobby passed through the Goldfields in late February, early March 1995 it caused extensive flooding inland.

It was interesting to note that Banded Stilts were totally absent from the Creery wetlands a few weeks' later. When I visited the Creery wetlands on 17 March 1995 I could not locate a single Banded Stilt.

It would be interesting to know how soon they departed after the inland rains had fallen. No one really knows what triggers their departure to inland areas. Could they be extremely sensitive to changes in barometric pressure?

I later heard on the RAOU hotline that large numbers of Banded Stilts had appeared near Menzies after the cyclonic rains. The exact date of this is unknown.

Marcus Singor

Editors' note: Fifteen thousand pairs of Banded Stilts were recorded at Lake Ballard north of Menzies in early April 1995 (see Observations section of this issue).

ANTI-PREDATOR BEHAVIOUR OF THE BANDED STILT AT CREERY WETLANDS

The small salt lake on Creery Island contained water for the first time in many months when I visited the area in mid February 1995. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stints and Red-capped Plovers were present, as were groups of Banded Stilts, scattered around the small lake. Some were standing in the water, some among the samphire and others were feeding while moving rapidly around the perimeter of the lake.

Suddenly groups of the smaller waders started taking off and swarmed around which made me suspect a bird of prey was in the neighbourhood. I looked around and found a departing raptor.

My attention then turned back to the lake, only to notice that at first glance all the Banded Stilts seemed to have disappeared. I thought this strange because I could not recall them flying away. However, standing in the water were two very tightly packed groups of Banded Stilts which, when alarmed by the raptor, must have congregated into these clumps almost instantaneously.

The only reference found relating to similar behaviour was on page 785 Volume 2 of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, quoting Kolichis (1976), "When the colony was approached by an aircraft the birds were seen to leave their eggs and huddle together in shallow water off the edge of the colony. They quickly returned to the nests once the aircraft had passed."

Marcus Singor

SCARLET ROBINS AT PIESSE BROOK

At 7.30 am on 22 April at Piesse Brook, I saw six Scarlet Robins, all in male plumage, chasing one another about and then sitting in pairs on low branches before once again joining in the chase. This continued for about 15 minutes.

Mary Bremner

WADERS AT THE SPEEDWAY

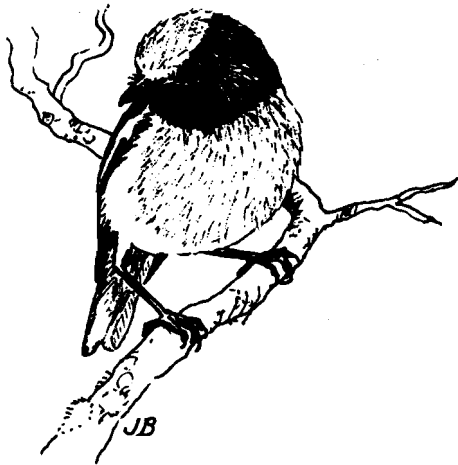
A recent issue of "Speedway Racing News" includes a small article concerning a nest of a plover (probably a Masked Lapwing) in the centre of a speedway racing track at Lismore, on the north coast of New South Wales. The nest and eggs were discovered when the promoter, Warren King, was "dive-bombed" while he was preparing the track. He cordoned off the area and warned drivers to avoid the vicinity of the nest. Apparently the birds and nest made it safely through the night, but the final outcome of the nesting attempt was not reported.

From March 1995 issue of "Speedway Racing News"

Margaret Philippon

Editors' note: Masked Lapwings are sometimes reported

nesting in close vicinity to other human activities, such as on playing fields and grassy margins of car parks, but it not known how successful they are in such situations.



MORE ON ROBINS AND FIRE

I was interested to read the article by Bryan Barrett on robins coming into burnt areas in the latest WABN. I can recall a similar incident. Back in 1993 a fire burnt through the Ellis Brook valley near Gosnells between the Barrington quarry and Bickley valley. The fire was quite extensive. I visited the area shortly afterwards and observed a pair of Red-capped Robins in the newly burnt areas. I think this was around May 1993 but I no longer have my notes to confirm this.

I do recall going back in spring to see if the robins were breeding but could find no trace.

I went back to the same area in 1994 and while the bush and low shrub were showing signs of regrowth the effects of the previous year's fire were still very evident. I observed a male Red-capped Robin in the area again on 27 May 1994. I remember wondering if the burnt area had something to do with its presence as I have never before seen Red-capped Robins so close to Perth or in this area.

I have visited the Ellis Brook valley for at least the last 10 years on a regular basis.

Marcus Singor

Notices

WA GROUP COMMITTEE 1995

At the AGM on 20 February, the following committee was elected:

Chairman: Brian Wilson
Vice Chairman: John Blyth
Hon Treasurer: Peter Anson
Hon Secretary: Margaret Philippon
Committee: Bryan Barrett, Helen Clark, Allan Jones (since resigned), Bill McRoberts, Clive Nealon, Rod Smith, Trevor Stoneman

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 1994

The main activity involving members during the year was the Hooded Plover Survey which runs in WA from 1st July 1994 to the end of June this year. This survey is part of an Australia-wide survey organised by the RAOU in Melbourne, to discover the numbers, distribution, and recruitment rate of this endangered species. Handled here by Phyllis Bentley, this survey has been well supported by members.

The next biggest activity has been the ongoing National Parks survey, now known as the Database of WA Birds, established by Clive Napier and now run by Max Bailey and Peter Sandilands. Over the years no less than 100,000 entries have been made in our computer, from reports sent in by members, of birds seen in defined areas of WA. A start is now being made on analysing this information to discover trends in bird movements and any other useful details.

Perry de Rebeira and others continued their birdbanding activities which again increases our knowledge of where birds live and their movements.

The usual programme of excursions and camp-outs was ably handled by Bill McRoberts and proved popular with members. There's an outing on a Saturday or Sunday roughly every one or two weeks, with occasional mid-week outings for those unable to make weekends. Camp-outs further afield took place on long weekends. We owe a vote of thanks to the many leaders of these outings who have willingly given their services, and to the leaders of the periodical walks for members of the public in Bold Park and elsewhere.

An excellent series of country brochures has been produced by Allan Jones, listing birds and where to see them in different country districts. These brochures have proved popular with local tourist bodies and Shire Councils, apart from publicising the RAOU.

The trading table, which is our main source of funds, has been well managed by Clive and Wendy Napier, with the sale of cards proving among the most profitable. Without this income the WA Group would definitely be struggling.

*"an excellent series of
country brochures has
been produced"*

Wendy Napier also manages the roster of volunteers who man the office (I'm not going to say "who people the office") on weekday mornings. It can't be said often enough how lucky we are to have such a band of stalwart volunteers prepared to undertake this and various other jobs. There's Jeremy Talbot, who in addition to his normal job of keeping the WA Government within the law, organises the list of speakers for our monthly meetings. There's his wife, Val, who sets up the tea and coffee at these meetings. There's Max Bailey, the office manager, who keeps the office running smoothly. There's Allan Jones who looks after the library and the sale of bird books as a service for members. There's Judy Blyth, our enthusiastic publicity officer, who puts together display boards and their material, for showing at suitable events such as school functions, country festivals, and urban shows. There's Graham Little, who for years has updated the Hotline with information about recent sightings of birds. There's Peter

