

Western Australian Bird Notes

No 75 September 1995

A Cruise on Lake Argyle

In January 1995 I organised a trip to the Kimberley with three experienced birders from Melbourne. We spent a week in Kununurra and a week in Broome. One of the best days of the trip was Sunday 8th when we arose at 3.45 am, left Kununurra at 4.20 am and arrived at Lake Argyle at 5.05 am. We had arranged a special boat trip on Lake Argyle with Lake Argyle Cruises run by Stephen Sharpe. The boat is excellent and can cruise at 50 km/h, with a draught of less than 50 cm, and a ramp at the front that allows you to get ashore easily without getting wet. Stephen provided plenty of drinks plus fruit and raisin bread to eat. The trip would have been \$600 (\$150 each), but Stephen had arranged some other people (non-birders) so the cost was only \$100 each and it was well worth it.

We soon saw some Pied Cormorants (about 100 for the day) and a White-bellied Sea-Eagle (the first of about 10 for the day, mostly immature), both of which would normally be considered unusual this far from the coast. It took just over an hour to get to the south end of the lake, where we spent most of our time along the Ord River. Our first goal was to see Yellow Chats, and we found them easily along the banks in full breeding colour. We would have seen at least 15 for the day. Lake Argyle is probably the only place in Australia where they can be almost guaranteed at any time of the year.

We then spent a little time looking for waders as we went up the river. They were common but scattered (mostly Wood and Common Sandpipers), but we also saw two Pacific Golden Plovers (new for my Argyle list), a few Marsh Sandpipers, a *Gallinago* sp. snipe (probably Swinhoe's) which walked into the grass, several Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, three Long-toed Stints (new for my Argyle list), a small flock of Oriental Pratincoles and six Australian Pratincoles on the grass near the shore. There were lots of waterbirds (especially Magpie Geese, Glossy Ibis and some Black-necked Storks and Brolgas) along the shores and in wet areas off to the side. There were also 200+ Purple Swamphens along the banks, plus many Singing Bushlarks in the grass and a few Brown Songlarks.

A Channel-billed Cuckoo (my best sighting to date of this

species) flew along the river being chased by a Torresian Crow. Some Budgerigars appeared to be breeding in the hollows in some dead trees, and a small group of Cockatiels flew across the river. A group of six Australian Bustards close to the shore were also good to see.

Our second main goal was to see Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens (new for me in WA). We stopped a few kilometres (maybe 4) along the Ord River where there was a large stand of eucalypts. Between them and the shore was a thicket of an introduced plant Jerusalem Thorn (a *Parkinsonia* species) mostly covered by wild passionfruit vine. We split up, and after seeing a few groups of Red-backed Fairy-wrens I found a male Purple-crowned Fairy-wren in breeding plumage plus two other birds. My companions had also found them, and I had good but brief views of a male and female in the sunlight. In an area of the thicket less than 200 m long by 20 m deep we saw four groups (although two were probably the same) totalling at least eight birds. The thicket stretched for possibly a kilometre along the bank, and Jerusalem Thorn is starting to establish itself in some other places. This area is a stronghold for this endangered species in the Kimberley, which would provide an interesting dilemma if someone decided to eradicate this introduced plant pest. Other good sightings for the area were some Bar-shouldered Doves (my first for my Argyle list), two Grey-fronted Honeyeaters, two Grey Shrike-thrushes, a Black-chinned (Golden-backed) Honeyeater and we heard a few Brush Cuckoos (new for my Argyle list).

Our third goal was to see rare waders, but here we were less successful. We turned back and made our way close to the banks. We found a few more Long-toed Stints and a very young Masked Lapwing. On a sand island there were a lot of terns including 50+ Caspian, 10+ Gull-billed, at least three White-winged (new for my Argyle list) and 50+ Whiskered. On the east bank there was a small bay with five Black-tailed Godwits and four Greenshanks among others. Past the point we could see 100+ Australian Pelicans, 2000+ Eurasian Coot and a flock of 500+ terns probably mostly Whiskered. Back

on the west bank where Argyle Diamonds used to have a barge pumping water to the mine we found a small group of Plumed Whistling-Ducks, and then a large flock of 400+ Oriental Pratincoles with about 20 Oriental Plovers in the grass back from the shore and another Pacific Golden Plover on the shore, plus one Little Curlew. Nearby there were large numbers of Magpie Geese plus some Comb-crested Jacanas including some young.

On the way back we stopped to look at a Black-necked Stork's nest (not in use) on the top of a small rock island, and a small group of Brush-tailed Rock Wallabies resting in the shade of a rock overhang. We arrived back shortly after 12 pm.

This was birding in comfort, with spectacular scenery, the history of the lake, and plenty of birds with 83 species seen between us in only half a day. Many of these were wet season migrants but the birding would be excellent at any time of the year especially if Yellow Chats and Purple-crowned Fairy-wrens are of interest. Stephen Sharpe was very helpful, and I would consider this trip to be a must for anyone visiting Kununurra who is interested in natural history and birds in particular.

Frank O'Connor

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)

Australian Shelduck - several pairs, 10/7/95, 5 nautical miles N of Rottnest (seen at different times of day, apparently flying from the mainland to Rottnest) - JB

Southern Giant-Petrel - 1, 26 and 29/6/95, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP

Kerguelen Petrel - small numbers 9/4/95 to 19/6/95 and 200+, 1 and 2/6/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Great-winged Petrel - 1, 8/3/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Soft-plumaged Petrel - 1+, May/June 1995, North Island, Abrolhos Group - BF (scarce winter visitor to the Abrolhos)

Broad-billed/Salvin's/Antarctic/Slender-billed/Fairy Prions - varying numbers, 17-19/7/95, beach-washed along the west coast south from Lancelin (Gingin) to about Busselton (Busselton) after gales, with hundreds (all five species, but mostly Salvin's (Medium-billed) Prion, *Pachyptila salvini*) in the Busselton area - various observers per WAM and RAOU (many specimens submitted to the WA Museum; data are being compiled and a report will be published elsewhere in due course)

White-chinned Petrel - up to 4 birds, 16/5/95 to 18/6/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Streaked Shearwater - several, March/April and May/June 1995, North Island, Abrolhos Group - BF

Black-browed Albatross - 8, 7/6/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 1 immature, 10/7/95, 5 nautical miles N of Rottnest - JB

Yellow-nosed Albatross - 200+, 26/5/95, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 16, 6/6/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Red-tailed Tropicbird - 3 single birds, early 1995, North Island, Abrolhos Group - BF

Australasian Gannet - 26 flying south in 1 hour, 25/7/95, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - MS

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 2, 8/4/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 1 sub-adult on sheep carcass, 1/6/95, Ravenswood (Murray) - MBa

Bar-tailed Godwit - 1, 8/3/95, Qindalup sandbar, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (uncommon south of Bunbury)

Lesser Sand Plover - 1, 8/3/95, Qindalup sandbar, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Hooded Plover - 1, 7/7/95, Cape Leeuwin (Augusta-Margaret River) - KL * 1, 7/7/95, Hamelin Bay (Augusta-Margaret River) - KL * 2 adults and possibly 2 juveniles, 8/7/95, Skippy Rock, Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park (Augusta-Margaret River) - SM

Great Skua - 1, 8/7/95 and 25/7/95, Woodman point (Cockburn) - MS * 11 over 6 hours, 19/7/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * several, 10/7/95, 5 nautical miles N of Rottnest - JB (uncommon this far north)

Pomarine Jaeger - 2, 2/4/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 1, 7/7/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Arctic Jaeger - 1, 5/3/95, Bunker Bay (Busselton) - RP * 1, 28/4/95, Sugarloaf Rock (Busselton) - RP

Weebill - 1, 20/4/95, Cape Naturaliste lighthouse (Busselton) - RP (unusual this far south west)

Western Yellow Robin - 1, 24/3/95 and 1, 25/4/95, in *Banksia* woodland at Whiteman Park (Swan) - MBr (rarely recorded in this part of the Swan Coastal Plain)

Crested Shrike-tit - 1, 16/7/95, in wandoo in Christmas Tree Well area (ca. 40 km SE of Armadale) (Wandering) - HC, SA, DS

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

Plumed Whistling-Duck - 3, 28/3/95, 70 km S of Newman (Meekatharra) - KC (unusual this far south)

Hardhead - 1, 31/7/95, Kanidal Beach, 10 km W of Eyre (Dundas) - EBO

Fiordland Penguin - 1, 4/7/95, beach-washed at Eyre (Dundas) - EBO

Black-breasted Buzzard - 1, 14/5/95, birrida on northern Peron Peninsula (Shark Bay) - MB

Beach Stone-curlew - 1, 6/7/95, Point Samson (Roebourne) - ST

Black-winged Stilt - 2, 14/5/95, birrida on northern Peron Peninsula (Peninsula (Shark Bay) - MB (rarely recorded on Peron Peninsula)

White-cheeked Honeyeater - 1, amongst many New Holland Honeyeaters, 7/95, Eyre (Dundas) - EBO (rare this far east in WA)

Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush - 4 adults and 1 nest with 2 eggs, 20/7/93, E side of Kennedy Range (Upper Gascoyne) - JS, HS

Star Finch - 50+, mostly juvenile, and nest with 2 young, early June 1995, 15 km E of Newman (Meekatharra) - MC (south-easterly limit of distribution in this area)

Tree Martin - 1000, 14/6/95, feeding on brine fly at a concentration pond, Cargill salt works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - MM

KIMBERLEY

Black Swan - 97, including several with nests with eggs and some young, 10/7/95, Lake Willson, south of the Dennison Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL (few breeding reports from the Kimberley)

Great Crested Grebe - 25, 11/7/95, Lake Willson, south of the Dennison Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL

Masked Booby - 2, 28/5/95, West Lacepedes (Broome) - KC (not normally seen here)

Red-footed Booby - 1, 16/5/95, Broome Harbour, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - KC (unusual at Broome) * 6 breeding, 17/5/95, Adele Island (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Great Frigatebird - 100+ breeding, 17/5/95, Adele Island (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Great-billed Heron - 2, 27/5/95, Talbot Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC, DM

Spotted Harrier - 1, 27/6/95, sitting on a nest (probably eggs or small young) Brolga Springs near the Ningbing Ranges (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Buff-banded Rail - 1, 28/5/95, West Lacepedes (Broome) - KC

Chestnut Rail - 3 including 1 juvenile being fed, 20/5/95, Prince Regent River (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC, DM

Purple Swamphen - 12, 9/7/95, Lewis and Slatey Creeks, near Dennison Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL (first records for SE Kimberley)

Beach Stone-curlew - 2, 24/5/95, Raft Point, Doubtful Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC, DM

Little Tern - 50+, 28/5/95, West Lacepedes (Broome) - KC

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo - 2, 9/7/95, Dennison Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL (at NE limit of distribution)

Rufous-crowned Emu-wren - several, 3/7/95 to 11/7/95, north of Gardner Range and several locations around the Gardner and Dennison Ranges (Halls Creek) - KC, GL (extension of known range to the north by about 100 km)

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater - 1+, 3/7/95, Gardner Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL * 1+, 13/7/95, Dennison Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL (these records are at the northern limit for this species)

White-lined Honeyeater - 1, 25/5/95, Sale River (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC (at SW limit of distribution)

Crested Bellbird - 1, 4/7/95, Gardner Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL

Masked Woodswallow and White-browed Woodswallow - several, 4/7/95, feeding at flowers of *Grevillea wickhamii*, Gardner Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL

Spinifexbird - several, 3/7/95, 5/7/95, Gardner Range (Halls Creek) - KC, GL

Golden-headed Cisticola - 1+, 3/7/95 and 6/7/95, near the Gardner Range (Halls Creek) KC, GL (extension of known range to the south by about 200 km)

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The Editors request contributors to note:

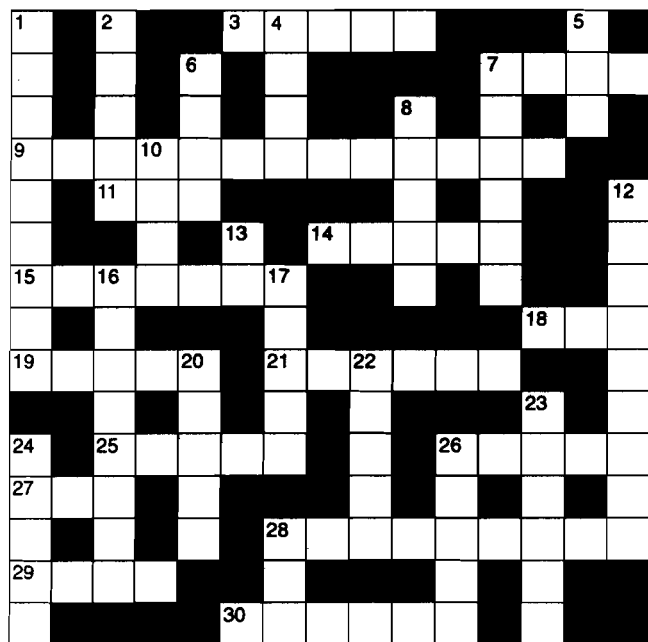
- WABN publishes material of interest to the WA Group
- contributions should be written or typed with **double spacing**
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary

Deadline for the December Issue

1 November 1995

at Perry House

Crossword



CLUES ACROSS

3. The sole representative of this family in Australia is a black-necked one.
7. You may have time for one while you wait for one to appear.
9. One of the feathered dinosaurs, a distant relative of today's birds.
11. The female of a bird species.
14. Secretive bird of the marshes.
15. Possibly the favoured food of a smart black and white coastal bird.
18. A common shape for a bird's nest.
19. Many parrots lay eggs which are roughly this shape.
21. If lucky, you may see one nesting on a cliff on Rottne Island.
25. Officially means "grey with age" but a certain grebe may feel insulted by the name.
26. May well be colourful but, unlike a king's, it can't be removed.
27. Sometimes used for marking birds in order to check movements.
28. Could describe the nests of both Mistletoebird and Yellow-breasted Sunbird.
29. One above or below the eye is often a useful identification feature.
30. A Willy Wagtail may well expect this from a hungry Australian Hobby!

CLUES DOWN

1. Together with colour and shape, this may help you to identify a bird easily.
2. Small bird, often seen in flocks in dry areas.
4. The formal genus name of the Barn Owl.
5. The "arch enemy" of small bush birds.
6. Often represents the State of Western Australia.
7. Author of an early Australian bird identification book.
8. Common material from which leg-bands are made.
10. May cause both birds and 'birdos' to lie low in the

middle of the day.

12. If conspicuous on the ground, may indicate a popular roosting site.
13. A fork may seem a good nest site, but if the limbs on either side fall off, you'd be left with this word only!
16. This Whiteface lacks a band across its lower breast.
17. Dull black.
20. Male duck.
22. It's essential for a bird to do this every day.
23. The bird equivalent of a crowded city in China.
24. A bird reaches its full colouration during this stage.
26. You may hear a Scrubfowl do this softly.
28. In past years, a Galah may well have been one of these.

Members' Contributions

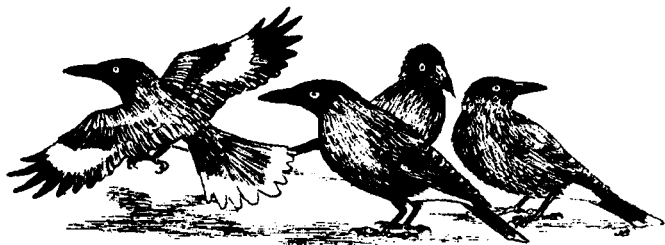
DISAPPEARING STILTS

At the Cargill salt works, Port Hedland, there are usually up to 1000 Banded Stilts and about 300 Red-necked Avocets during winter. This year, both species left the saltworks after rain in the middle of February. By mid-June some avocets (about 40) had returned, but the stilts were still absent. It will be interesting to see when they return.

Mal McKenzie

GREY CURRAWONGS ON THE SWAN COASTAL PLAIN

From Margery Clegg's and my observations it would appear that this species is resident in The Spectacles Reserve, Kwinana. We have been visiting the area since it was first drawn to our attention by work done by Mike Bamford. On nine out of 10 visits, spread over the past five years, we have seen or heard Grey Currawongs, nearly always near the wetter area but never among the banksia woodlands. I would, however, agree that we do not find them in any other locality away from the hills. And a further observation on the distribution of the species in the Darling Range: they are quite common along the upper regions of Helena Valley; can nearly always be observed close to Mundaring Weir and in Jacoby Park. We sometimes find them along one of the valleys which cross Flynn Road, Mundaring Shire, when the creeks are flowing, but we only find them in one part of that district.



My conclusion is that they prefer to be close to some form of water. Against the above observation, I am well aware of the fact that they can often be observed along the edge of the Albany Highway.

Bryan Barrett

BOOK REVIEW

BIRDS OF SOUTHWESTERN AUSTRALIA:

An atlas of changes in distribution and abundance of the wheatbelt fauna

by Denis Saunders and John Ingram

This book is the result of a three-year survey of birds in the wheatbelt and other parts of southwestern Australia. The survey was overseen by the authors and conducted by 187 members of the public at a total of over 150 sites. It is published by Surrey Beatty and Sons and is available in soft cover at \$39.95.

Denis Saunders is well known for his views on the importance of conservation biologists communicating their results to the general public and being a part of the process for change which the results of their science suggest is necessary. Accordingly, the survey and the book are as much about trying to generate favourable actions for the conservation of birds and other wildlife as about documenting the circumstances which need changing.

The book starts with two short introductory chapters, outlining the need for ecologically sustainable development in the southwest of Western Australia, describing the study region, its history of development and the resulting environmental changes.

Chapter three describes the approach taken to the survey and the presentation of results. Those results, in Chapter 4, "Species Accounts", take up over 240 of the book's total of 296 pages, and provide much fascinating detail for anyone with an interest in birds. Each species account occupies a full page, sometimes two, and is made up of a summary of what is known about the historical and current status of the species in the southwest, and an assessment of whether it has increased, remained stable or declined. The distribution of the species is presented in map form, usually with two maps per species. One of the maps is based on the reports of 10 observers between 1900 and 1937, and the other shows the sightings reported by participants in the survey between 1987 and 1990. Reporting rates, as a percentage of observers reporting the species, is given for the period 1900-1937 and for the period of this survey. For over 50 species, seasonal occurrence in the study area is graphed.

The results are discussed and summarised in Chapter 5, "Changes in distribution and/or abundance of birds of the wheatbelt", and this chapter provides an excellent introduction to the ecological principles which influence the abundance and distribution of birds. The book concludes with a short chapter on "Conservation Actions".

There is much in this book to interest birdwatchers, other naturalists, and landowners throughout the southwest. Despite the overall conclusion that almost half of the species of birds throughout the wheatbelt have declined, the atlas of actual sightings during the time 1987-1990 indicate that some very rarely seen birds, such as the Malleefowl, Bush Stone-curlew, Bustard and Southern Scrub-robin, are still distributed, albeit sparsely, over much of the wheatbelt. If the right changes in land management result from the current emphasis upon landcare and ecologically sustainable development, it may not be too late for many of these species to re-establish themselves throughout much of their original range.

Like many biological atlas projects based upon input from

the public, questions can be raised about the reliability of sightings and the thoroughness with which records are assessed. Verification of data is referred to, but further discussion of this point would have made a useful addition, and allowed a more critical judgement of the reliability of conclusions.

Another potential problem (which the authors have obviously thought about) is the difficulty of comparing the modern survey with very sparse historical information to obtain realistic estimates of changes in abundance or distribution. Specifically, the 10 published accounts of bird observations in various parts of the wheatbelt, which were used to assess historical status, were probably all written by experienced birdwatchers. On the other hand, the experience and skills of the volunteers contributing to this survey were perhaps very varied (although the reader is given no information about this). Differences in skill at finding and observing birds or experience in identifying them could result in different recording rates and therefore different assessment as to status. This problem would flow through to the calculation of reporting rates as a percentage of observers in the two periods, and is particularly acute for secretive birds and for small, relatively nondescript species, such as thornbills and small honeyeaters.

The authors have attempted to overcome these problems in two ways. Firstly, by using whatever literature is available to confirm any conclusion drawn by comparison between historical and current information. That is, did any of the 10 historical observers, or others since then, report declines in number or range of any species? Secondly, by considering the situation 'from first principles'; that is, if a particular species is dependent upon a specific type of habitat and that habitat is reduced greatly in area it seems inevitable that the species will decline in abundance and distribution.

Given the importance of habitat loss in the assignment of status to various species, it is a little surprising that no reference is made to authors like Wilson (1988) who have presented evidence for a significant correlation between the loss of habitat and the number of species retained. Wilson (1988) argued that a 90% loss of habitat is likely to result in an eventual loss of 50% of the original species. This provides an ominous extension to the major conclusion of this study, that almost half of the bird species of the wheatbelt (which has been approximately 90% cleared) have declined in range and abundance.

The questions discussed above do not significantly affect the major conclusion, nor do they diminish the value or interest of the book as a whole. As the authors intended, the atlas project has focused attention upon the issue of nature conservation in the wheatbelt and has resulted in a considerable increase in the number of people in local communities throughout the wheatbelt who are interested in birds and have some understanding of their ecological needs. These people will constitute a significant force for continuing change towards more sustainable farming methods.

Like all books published by Surrey Beatty and Sons, the presentation is excellent; uncluttered, easy to read and with a number of colour plates throughout. The plates illustrate many of the factors important to various species of birds, and some of the general principles of sustainable agriculture. Editing has been very thorough, with few typographical errors, and the list of references provides an excellent introduction to the

status and conservation of birds in southwestern Australia.

This book is likely to be the definitive reference on the status of birds in the agricultural areas of WA for many years. It will also be the first book I consult when planning birdwatching trips to the wheatbelt!

John Blyth

Reference: Wilson, E.O., 1988. *Biodiversity*. National Academy Press, Washington DC.

ATLANTIC OCEAN BIRD EXPEDITION

Although we have been members of the RAOU for some years, since we moved to Swan View, where we regularly see some 60 species of birds, our participation in birdwatching excursions has been minimal. We use our knowledge of, and interest in, birds to enliven our travel experiences, rather than travelling specifically to see birds.

Shortly before Christmas 1994 we received a brochure from Chris Doughty's Peregrine Bird Tours announcing a trip which would make up for all the bird excursions we had not been on previously. It was advertised as an Atlantic Ocean cruise from Ushuaia, Argentina to Plymouth, England. Visits to the Falkland Islands and South Georgia held the promise of birdlife on a massive scale. We were not disappointed.

The Estonian research vessel *Livonia*, on charter to the Canadian company Marine Expeditions, was our home for 50 days. Although she has a capacity of 36 passengers, only 16 people had booked on this cruise. Passengers were outnumbered by the 25 crew and four Marine Expeditions staff. Chris Doughty, who accompanied us as ship's naturalist, was always on hand to identify birds. The expedition leaders went out of their way to ensure we visited places of most interest.

The majority of our fellow-passengers, although all interested in natural history, were not fanatical birdwatchers. Three had come specifically to see the birds. Two of those were particularly keen to add rare endemics to their lifetime lists.

Conditions were ideal for birdwatching as we had the full run of the ship, including the bridge, at all times. The bridge made an excellent viewing platform, particularly when seas were too rough for us to be out on deck. Chris and the keen birdwatchers spent practically all the daylight hours there during the early part of the cruise. Nearer the equator far fewer birds were seen between islands. The disappointment of the one day when no birds were sighted was tempered by the day when both tropical and Antarctic birds, Brown Boobies and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, were seen together near Tristan da Cunha.

A total of 184 species of birds was recorded. This included five species of Penguin (King, Gentoo, Rockhopper, Macaroni and Magellanic), and seven species of Albatross (Wandering, Royal, Black-browed, Grey-headed, Yellow-nosed, Sooty, and Light-mantled). Chris claimed an Amsterdam Island Albatross of which tiny numbers nest in the southern Indian Ocean. Unfortunately he was alone at the time. Wandering and Black-browed Albatross became familiar companions as they floated effortlessly over the ship.

Although we struck some unpleasant weather, including sleet during our first zodiac landing, we were absolutely entranced by the birdlife we saw in the Falklands. The first colony of Penguins we visited was on the inauspiciously named

Carcass Island. Here it was possible to observe and photograph the colourful Rockhopper and Gentoo Penguins from a mere two metres.

South Georgia was a total contrast to the Falklands; it was very green, where the Falklands' late-summer vegetation was brownish-grey. The light was much clearer and brighter, though this could be attributed to the better weather we experienced there. Our first view of icebergs was quite breathtaking and the 60,000 or so King Penguins at Salisbury Plain were a sight never to be forgotten. Their sleek, shiny silver grey backs, brilliant white fronts, enlivened by bright yellow, and pink-sided bills make them the most attractive of birds. When we stood still the Penguins approached within a metre of us. Sometimes when we walked they followed us in single file.

Other highlights included seeing rafts of thousands of Shearwaters and Prions feeding just metres in front of the ship between Gough and Inaccessible Islands (near Tristan da Cunha). Numbers of Prions and Petrels stranded on the ship each night in this area provided delightful close encounters with these beautiful creatures. After overnighting in the "Bird Rehabilitation Centre" (a willing passenger's cabin) they were presented for a "press conference" before being released.

Officially only eight pairs of the Wirebird (St Helena Plover) survive and our island guide was dubious whether we would see them at all. He thought the best chance would be on the golf course and here we found 30, many of them young birds!

A bonus for the birdlisters was the Razo Island Skylark found only on this small island in the Cape Verde group. The zodiac landing on its rocky shore was very tricky. When we climbed six metres up from the water and stepped onto the plain above we were surrounded by Skylarks and Spanish Sparrows. An Osprey circled overhead.

As casual birdwatchers we were pleased to be the only people to see two vagrants during the trip: a Cattle Egret at Stanley in the Falklands and a Ruddy Turnstone (also well-known to us here) on the shore in Tristan da Cunha.

The cruise was a fantastic wildlife experience. All participants gave the thumbs-up to its nature interest. Most of the non-birdwatchers considered themselves at least mild-birdwatchers by the end of the trip.

(Marine Expeditions run regular Arctic and Antarctic cruises, as well as repositioning cruises such as ours. We would recommend them to anyone interested in natural history.)

Loreley and Philip Morling

HOODED PLOVER SURVEY

August will see many RAOU members involved in the Hooded Plover Project. At the time of writing, the five field trips outlined in the *WAHOOPS* newsletter are organised and ready to go.

The numerous lakes east of Grass Patch will be searched by members of the enthusiastic Esperance group. This group is also planning a trip later in the year to search beaches and nearby lakes between Israelite Bay and Wattle Camp. The RAOU members who searched areas in the January 1995 Hooded Plover count have been asked to repeat the searches during August. It is hoped that all members will be on the lookout for Hooded Plovers and send in reports of sightings.

Notices

Remember to watch out for banded birds. One hundred Hooded Plovers were banded with metal bands at Lake Gore by Michael Weston in February (see WABN 74:1-2). To date there has been no report of a sighting of any of these birds. In January over 1,500 Hooded Plovers were known to be in the Esperance area, but by March very few were still there. This year many inland areas have received above-average rainfall and this may influence the movement and breeding of the birds.

It is planned to repeat the August field trips in January 1996.

Phyllis Bentley

Country Groups

ALBANY GROUP

The June outing, attended by 13 people, was to Boxwood Hills Golf Course, Jerramungup Shire. The day was perfect for birdwatching and was well worth the rather long drive to get there.

The Albany Group meets on the second Tuesday of each month. The 11 July meeting was an indoor one with some videos, slides and general discussion (everybody leaves Albany in July!).

Contact numbers are printed on the Albany Brochure, and we've just had 1500 new ones printed. Visitors are always welcome.

Tel: (098) 44 1073 **Viv McCormick**
Tel: (098) 44 7540 **Ray Garstone**
Tel: (098) 44 4460 **Charlie Davies**

ESPERANCE BIRD OBSERVERS' GROUP

On the weekend 6/7 May, 20 Esperance Bird Observers' Group (EBOG) members, including six children, spent a weekend camping at Moir Rock, about 165 km north of Esperance.

John and Jeanette Hyndes have been doing regular bird counts here and at nearby Peak Charles, for five years and we joined them for one of their counts.

Thirty-one species were seen over the weekend, adding six species to the Hyndes' list of 65 species for Moir Rock. The vegetation is open woodland, predominantly mallee.

As well as checking out the birds, we explored the rock and surrounding bush and drove to Peak Charles for an afternoon, about 35 km west. Several members climbed part way up the peak, while three made the arduous climb to the summit (651 m) to enjoy the view amidst the soaring Wedge-tailed Eagles.

Many enjoyable yarns were told around the campfire on the cold nights and the weekend was hailed a great success. Thanks to John and Jeanette for sharing their considerable knowledge of the area and birds.

Further camps are planned with the next one in spring to a rock near Cascade. Also planned are a hunt for the elusive Malleefowl spotted about 70 km north-east of Esperance, to be led by Allan Rose, and bird surveys of bush reserves in the Esperance region.

Kate Dawson

PO Box 150, Esperance 6450
Tel (090) 71 3304

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING OF MEMBERS – 22 OCTOBER 1995

Members will recall that at the Annual General Meeting held February 1995, brief consideration was given to a proposal to increase the number of WA Group Committee members from 10 to 11, due to the increased number of activities in this State and the need to share responsibilities.

An Extraordinary General Meeting will be held on Monday 22 October 1995 in conjunction with the General Meeting to be held at Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, commencing at 8 pm.

It is proposed that section 5 of the Rules be amended to provide for a Committee consisting of a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and seven Committee members (currently six).

In accordance with section 17 of the Rules, the RAOU Council (at HQ, Victoria) has approved this proposed amendment and it now remains for the Extraordinary General Meeting to formally adopt the amendment.

BIRDING HOTLINE

In the June issue, members were invited to ring the RAOU office with comments about the proposal to discontinue the Hotline service. As no responses have been received as yet, the WA Group Committee has decided that this telephone number can be put to better use as a facsimile line, which will improve communications with our members and affiliated groups around the country.

Accordingly, our facsimile number is (09) 387 8412.

INVITATION TO DUNSBOROUGH

I have a Kowa TSN3 x 20 scope set up permanently inside my house and invite any interested visitors to the Cape Naturaliste area to call and have a look through it. Some interesting species of seabirds can often be seen.

Tel/fax (097) 55 3263

Ross Payton

NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined the RAOU WA Group between 1 January and 25 July 1995. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

S Abercromby, K Ashbury, N J Beissel, T Blake, J M Bligh, P Boglio, E Bowles, L Brent-White, D Brockis, L Bromhead, G Brooks, J Brooks, K Chatfield, B Cooney, K Cooper, C H Cornes, J C Darnell, S Davies, F Faulkner, J Fisher, C Gangell, D J Garic, M Gibbs, T Giles, T O Giles, J Gye, J Haggas, M H Henderson, S Henderson, M Hitchins, Y Hocking, A Honti, P A Hyman, J P Hyndes (Mr & Mrs), R King, G Kirkman, J Kirkwood, I Kirsten, G K Lane, J Langford, W R Maddeford, S Marsh, K A Mazzucchelli, W McBride (Mr & Mrs), A Musca, M Nairn, G Nienow, M M O'Connor, B A Payne, P A Phillips, C A Phillips, E E Pyatt, C Reidy, V M Saffer, P J Scott, B M Sherrard, J D Stewart, N Taylor (Mr & Mrs), A Thomson, R Vaughan, T R Walton, F Watson, J White, L Whiteside, J J Wilksch and D Williamson.

Margaret Philippon

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY – CAN YOU ASSIST?

Eyre is presently in need of assistance with the provision of an extra toilet/ablution block. A single toilet and one bathroom now serve the needs of the wardens and all visitors. Extra facilities are needed urgently.

An effort has been made to meet those requirements through approaches to CALM and by making grant applications, so far to no avail. This then is an appeal to someone with ideas which will help us to achieve our aim. Is there a reader of *WA Bird Notes* who knows of a funding source? Or someone who has the expertise to organise the creation of a toilet/ablution block? Are there volunteers who are prepared to spend time at Eyre doing whatever manual tasks are required to instal such a facility?

Any bright idea at all would receive a grateful reception. Eyre is scraping by at the moment and the credit for its survival must be given to all the wardens who for years have survived on a pittance while working doggedly at their tasks.

Please contact Eyre Bird Observatory Management Committee through Rod Smith on (09) 397 5319 or (09) 293 2777, or the RAOU (WA Group) office on (09) 383 7749.

Rod Smith

WADER MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Further to my note in the last issue of WABN regarding the monitoring of wader movements, the project has been designed to provide further information on the changes in the populations of the various species which visit our State. Fifty-one species could be seen, of which 15 are resident and 36 are regular migrants (with at least a further 16 other species occasionally being recorded as vagrants).

Within the State 52 areas have been identified by Doug Watkins *et al* (1993) as of international importance, and an additional three areas of national importance for shorebirds. Counts at regular intervals within these designated areas of wetlands and others of lesser importance will allow us to follow population trends. It will also give an indication of human disturbance, drought and other causes for concern.

It is hoped that individual members, or in the case of some of our larger lakes, etc, groups of members, will volunteer to monitor a designated area at least twice a year (preferably more frequently), to count the wader population. Each volunteer will be issued with the necessary forms on which to record their sightings and a sheet of instructions. Also, as the organisers realise that waders carry the unfortunate stigma of being difficult to identify, an easy-to-follow identification sheet of those species which are most likely to be encountered will be included with each kit.

Two major counts will be called for each year that the project lasts, to coincide with counts being taken in other States, so that an overall picture of the Australian wader population can be obtained. These will add to earlier counts made in the 1980s for many of the sites.

Apart from the member or group assigned to a named wetland, it is hoped that other members will take part in the project and record what they find. In other words, the more records we get throughout the year the greater our ultimate knowledge, and it is hoped that many people will take up the challenge. If you wish to look at any of the listed areas or any

other wetlands, please contact us so that we can send you the necessary information and forms.

Set out below is a list of 56 wetlands, some of which it is hoped will be monitored during the project.

Bryan Barrett - Organiser

Areas of International and National Importance for Waders

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Jandabup Lake NR | 28. Benjup-Benjup Lake |
| 2. Lake Joondalup | 29. White Lake |
| 3. Swan Marine Park * | 30. Lake E Munglinup |
| 4. Kogolup Lake | 31. Lake King |
| 5. Thomsons Lake NR | 32. Dunn Rock NR |
| 6. Forrestdale Lake NR | 33. Lake Grace North |
| 7. Lake Cooloongup | 34. Dumblyung Lake NR |
| 8. Lake McLarty | 35. Lake Quarbung |
| 9. Lake Clifton | 36. White Water Lake |
| 10. Rottnest Island | 37. Mears Lake NR |
| 11. Garden Island | 38. Nambling, nearby lake |
| 12. Peel Inlet | 39. Walyormoorung Lake NR |
| 13. Vasse-Wonnerup wetlands | 40. Ninan Lake NR |
| 14. Blackwood estuary | 41. Hinds Lake NR |
| 15. Wilson Inlet | 42. Shark Bay area |
| 16. Albany harbours | 43. Lake Macleod |
| 17. Grassmere Lake NR | 44. Dampier Saltworks |
| 18. Kwooncup Lake | 45. Port Hedland Saltworks |
| 19. Ballcup Lake NR | 46. Eighty Mile Beach |
| 20. Culham Inlet | 47. Anna Plains |
| 21. Oldfield estuary | 48. Roebuck Bay |
| 22. Lake Gore NR | 49. Roebuck Plains |
| 23. Gidon wetlands | 50. Lake Eda |
| 24. Kubitch Lake | 51. Lake Gregory |
| 25. Karbul Lake | 52. Camballin flood plain |
| 26. Station Lake | 53. Lake Argyle |
| 27. Warden Lake NR | 54. Parry flood plain |

* consists of three separate sites: Alfred Cove, Pelican Point and Milyu Reserve.

Reference:

Watkins, D. (1993) *A National Plan for Shorebird Conservation in Australia*. RAOU Report No. 90.

Notices

THE NIGHT PARROT IS AUSTRALIA'S MOST MYSTERIOUS BIRD!

It is secretive and nocturnal, and lives in far-flung and isolated places. It has declined in abundance and distribution since 1900. There have been very few confirmed sightings this century and it is endangered.

But reports keep coming in – from the Gascoyne, Pilbara, southern Kimberley and along the Canning Stock Route. In 1990, a dead bird was found near Boulia in Western Queensland. This was the first specimen collected for more than 80 years.

The essential first step to conserving Night Parrots is locating birds in the wild. **You can help us find and protect this unique, endangered bird.**

Appearance: About 24 cm (9.5") in length. Similar colouring to a budgerigar but larger, more robust and shorter tailed (see below).

