

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 79 September 1996

Sighting of Purple-backed Starling (*Sturnus sturninus*) on Christmas Island

On 4 June 1996 our family were sitting on the east verandah of House MQ631 at Silver City, Christmas Island, Indian Ocean. Graham saw a bird in the bushes along the fenceline. At first glance it appeared to be a honeyeater approximately the size of a Tawny-crowned Honeyeater (*Phylidonyris melanops*). Graham collected the binoculars (Zeiss 8 x 20 B and Nikon 8 x 32). We ventured closer for a better look at it. It was moving around the small white flowers on a garden fenceline shrub, acting like a honeyeater, but its beak, instead of being long and curved, was quite straight.

It was a light grey bird approximately 18 cm in length. The head and body appeared very sleek with a shortish tail in relation to the rest of the body. The round dark eye was clearly visible and a thin white ring could be seen around the outer edge. A suggestion of a narrow black line extended from the gape.

The bird moved to the south side of the garden where it ate a small red berry, the fruit of a fenceline shrub. A brief glimpse of the inside of the mouth revealed a bright orange/red palate. From this position, we were able to get a better rear view of the bird. There was a distinct white wing bar which extended to form a 'V' shape at the back and some small secondary barring adjacent. The leading primaries appeared glossy black until caught by the sunlight, when they showed an iridescent green (similar to the Emerald Dove common on Christmas Island, only much darker). The underside (belly area) appeared to be a very pale, pale grey with a buff colour around the vent area. I remarked on the possibility of a dark mark at the back of the head but we thought it may have been a shadow. The legs were a grey colour with quite a long tarsus.

It was not a bird we had seen before. As a reference, we had been using the list in the article "Christmas Island" by Tom Smith (*Australian Birding Magazine*, Summer 1995—96). We consulted this and the only unfamiliar bird listed was

a Brown Shrike. We contacted Richard Hill, RAOU Project Officer on Christmas Island, who was fortunately willing and able to come to have a look. He brought two Asian field guides. These were MacKinnon and Phillipps (1993) and King *et al.* (1984).

From our description, Richard indicated the starlings on Plate 82 of MacKinnon and Phillipps, (1993). The male Purple-backed Starling was a distinct likeness.

We looked around the garden and eventually a bird flew from a tree adjacent to the fenceline. It landed in a tall acacia, *Lucaena leucocephala* in the neighbour's yard. Richard and I went to one side of the tree and Graham went to the other. Finally we saw a bird moving around towards the outer edge of the tree. It appeared to be the same bird we had sighted earlier. Richard studied the bird through the binoculars for some time, but a better view could be gained from Graham's position. We moved around and continued to study the bird. From this angle the underbelly appeared much whiter, the buff vent area was again clearly evident and a dark tip to the underside of the tail was seen. The black mark at the nape was also quite visible (it had not been a shadow!). The white wing barring was quite distinct against what still appeared to be glossy black wing feathers. It continued to move around the branches. Richard believed he saw it take an insect.

In MacKinnon and Phillipps (1993) we considered the grey colouring of the head and body, the dark eye with the white ring and the buff vent area to be a very good likeness, although the centre back and wings had appeared as a shiny black except for the iridescent green which had been noted during a brief flash of sunlight. The long tarsus is also evident.

In King *et al.* (1984) the illustration of the wing positioning over the tail and the wing bar forming a V when viewed from the back was a better likeness. The dark mark as a continuation of the gape is evident.

The tail appeared slightly rounder than indicated by either

of the field guides. The dark tip observed on the underside of the tail is not illustrated.

From our observations and the use of the field guides we are confident that the bird was a male Purple-backed Starling (*Sturnus sturninus*).

Graham and Gwen Goodreid

References:

- MacKinnon, J. and Phillipps, K. 1993. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali*. Oxford University Press, New York
- King, B.F., Dickinson, E.C. and Woodcock, H.W. 1984. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia*. Collins, London.

Editor's Note: The comments in the article above highlight some major differences in field guides and emphasise the need to take detailed notes and drawings when a new bird is encountered. It was fortunate that this bird (from the description) was a male. Most Asian field guides do not illustrate female or young starlings, which can be quite difficult to distinguish. This and some other Asian starling species are migrants and could perhaps turn up on Christmas Island, Cocos-Keeling or even in northern Australia. The need to take detailed notes and sketches cannot be over-emphasised. The Purple-backed (Daurian) Starling breeds in China and migrates to SE Asia and the Greater Sundas for the northern winter. The bird observed on Christmas Island must have got lost!

If you are planning a trip to Christmas Island, don't forget to take with you a copy of Mike Craig's informative article on the birds of the island and where to see them, in WABN 78, 14-16.

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.

This issue sees a report of yet another species for the Australian list this time a Purple-backed (Daurian) Starling from Christmas Island. Also recorded on Christmas Island in May was a female flowerpecker (same family as the Mistletoebird). However, there are lots of flowerpeckers, the females are very difficult to distinguish, and it is uncertain which species this bird belonged to. There have also been some exciting records from various parts of WA, including a probable Night Parrot on the Canning Stock Route, a Black Bittern in the south-west, and some seabirds rarely seen in the south-west.

Observers are reminded that, for rarely seen or difficult to identify species, adequate documentation is required for inclusion in WABN. For example, new records, or records of species rarely recorded in the south-west should be accompanied by a description of what was *actually seen* and reasons for the identification. Note that a statement to the effect that what was seen fitted a description in a field guide is a statement about what is in a field guide, and does not tell anyone else what you actually saw. Good notes, and preferably

sketches, are important. Providing extra details also assists the editors to provide extra information to readers.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Emu - adult and 9 young, 3/6/96, Pipidinnny Swamp, S of Yanchep NP (Wanneroo)DL

Hardhead - 100-150, 12/7/96, Wellard wetlands (Kwinana) - BBa, MCI

Giant-Petrel sp. - 4 in juvenile plumage, 23/7/96, at a whale carcass, Cottesloe Beach (Cottesloe) - KL

Southern Giant-Petrel - 40-45, including an adult white morph, 22/6/96, at a whale carcass 30 nautical miles off Ledge Point -MS (see article below by Marcus Singor) * 11 juveniles, 22/7/96, at a whale carcass, Cottesloe Beach (Cottesloe) - MC

Cape Petrel - 300+, 22/6/96, at a whale carcass 30 nautical miles off Ledge Point - MS (see article below by Marcus Singor) * 19, 22/7/96, at a whale carcass, Cottesloe Beach (Cottesloe) - MC * ca. 15, 23/7/96, at a whale carcass, Cottesloe Beach (Cottesloe) - KL

Kerguelen Petrel - small numbers in February and March 1996; higher counts of 20+ over 8 hrs on 13/2/96, 20+ over 6 hrs on 6/3/96, 15+ over 5 hrs on 7/3/96, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (apparently unusual at this time of year)

Great-winged Petrel - 1, 6/2/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

White-headed Petrel - small numbers on numerous occasions between 1/2/96 and 13/4/96; higher counts of 20+ over 8 hrs on 13/2/96 and 4/3/96, 20+ over 7 hrs on 5/3/96, 20+ over 5 hrs on 24/3/96 and 5/4/96, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (not often recorded; apparently unusual in these numbers at this time of year)

Blue Petrel - 1, 16/7/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Grey Petrel - 2 over five hours, 19/2/96 and again on 20/2/96 and 1 in six hours, 2/3/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (rarely recorded in WA)

Streaked Shearwater - 3 over four hours, 4/3/96, and 1 in seven hours, 5/3/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (very southerly records for this species in WA)

Flesh-footed Shearwater - 350+ in one hour, 27/3/96, Gull Rock, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 300+ (50/ hour) over 6 hours, 27/3/96 and 1/4/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 200+ in one hour, 22/4/96, Hopetoun Pier (Ravensthorpe) - RP

Short-tailed Shearwater - 2 over six hours, 12/2/96 and 1 in six hours, 26/2/96, both at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Wandering Albatross - 1, 16/7/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Grey-headed Albatross - 1, 30/6/96 and 1, 16/7/96, both immatures, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 1, 30/6/96 and up to 8 at once, 7/7/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD * 3, 7/7/96, North Mole, (Fremantle) - KL

White-faced Storm-Petrel - 1, 6/2/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Australasian Gannet - regularly at North Mole from mid-January to August, with a maximum of 10/hour on 30/6/96 (Fremantle) - JD * small numbers on various occasions from 13/2/96 to 12/4/96, with highest counts being 7 over six hours

on 26/2/96 (uncommon at this time of year) and 8 over six hours on 1/4/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 350+ in one hour, Hopetoun Pier (Ravensthorpe) - RP

Black Bittern - 1, 11/4/96, Warren River in Warren National Park (Manjimup) - CB, AH (description supplied; essentially, it was a very dark-coloured bittern with a prominent yellow streak down each side of the neck; the neck and breast were white-streaked; wings back and belly were a uniform dark brown, almost black; size similar to nearby Nankeen Night Herons, alarm call a short grunting noise) (this species is now extremely rare in the south-west)

Glossy Ibis - 2, 1/4/96, Big Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CNe * 13, 6/6/96, Maurice Hamer Park, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - CB

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 8/6/96, near Serpentine River estuary (Murray) - MS * 1, 14/6/96, Creery wetlands (Murray) - MS

Banded Stilt - 3000, 12/6/96, Lake Gore (Esperance) - AC

Hooded Plover - 9, 17/4/96, Wellstead Estuary, Bremer Bay (Jerramungup) - RP

Great Skua - up to 10, 30/6-13/7/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Pomarine Jaeger - single birds on 21/2/96, 26/2/96, 19/3/96 and 27/3/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Arctic Jaeger - 3, 27/3/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 15 juvenile/immatures, including 5 dark phase, 22/6/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Pacific Gull - 1 immature, 16/7 and 31/7/96, North Mole (Fremantle) - JD (rarely recorded on this part of the coast)



Southern Giant Petrel
Drawn: Judy Blyth

Fork-tailed Swift - 30+, 10/4/96, Frenchman Bay (Albany) - CD, LD

White-breasted Robin - 1, 7/5/96, Helena River below CSIRO labs, present one day only (Mundaring) - MBr

White-winged Triller - breeding, summer of 1993/94 and 1994/95, 20 km S of Margaret River (Augusta-Margaret River) - GMa (southern limit on west coast)

European Goldfinch - 1, 6/7/96, Lake Coogee (Cockburn) - JC, DC *et al.* (presumed to be an escapee)

White-backed Swallow - 3, 3/6/96, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) (not often sighted this far south on the Swan Coastal Plain) - MS, GA

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

Chestnut Teal - 1 male with three presumed females, 28/6/96, lake on Great Northern Highway at Wallal Downs (Broome) - CN, WN (rarely recorded this far north)

Black-breasted Buzzard - 1, 8/5/96, Nallan Station (Cue) - MC

Grey Falcon - 2, 18/5/96, 10 km S of Carranya (Halls Creek) - SN *et al.* * 3, 24/5/96, 25 km S of Billiluna (Halls Creek) - SN *et al.* * 22/6/96, 28 km S of Breaden Hills (Halls Creek) - SN *et al.* * 1, 7/5/96, Jimblebar Ck, 50 km E of Newman (East Pilbara) - GM

Australian Spotted Crane - 1, 11/7/96, Dragon Tree Soak (Kiriji Ba Yadula) (Broome) - MBa

Inland Dotterel - 1+, 3/2/96, 15 km N of Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - KC * 5, 25/6/96, Lake Tobin (East Pilbara) (this is a very northerly record for this species) - SN *et al.*

Major Mitchell's Cockatoo - 25, Calvert Range (Wiluna) - MC, SS

Princess Parrot - 14, 20/5/96, 35 km S of Well 45, plus 5, 22/5/96, 37 km S of Well 45, plus 19, 23/6/96, 36 km S of Well 45, plus 7, 26/6/96, 35-48 km S of Well 45, Canning Stock Route (Halls Creek) - all SN *et al.* * 12, ca. 30 km S of Joanna Spring (Bikarung) at 20°05', 124°05' (East Pilbara) - MBa

probable **Night Parrot** - 2, 8/6/96, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - MG

Pheasant Coucal - 1, 11/7/96, Dragon Tree Soak (Kiriji Ba Yadula) (Broome) - Mba

White-winged Fairy-wren - 1, 3/11/95, apparently black, with several "brown" birds, at Peron HS, Shark Bay (Shark Bay) - SM (note: the bases of the blue feathers are black, so birds can appear black under certain lighting conditions, particularly when moulting)

Striated Grasswren - 2, 11/7/96, Onslow road near junction with North West Coastal Highway (Ashburton) - CN, WN

Chestnut-rumped Thornbill - 3, 21/5/96, Onegunyah Rockhole (Wiluna) - MC (at or near N limit of distribution)

Slaty-backed Thornbill - 2, 21/5/96, Onegunyah Rockhole (Wiluna) - MC

Banded Whiteface - 5, 14/5/96, Well 9, Canning Stock Route (Wiluna) - MC * 7, 23/6/96, Well 42, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - SN *et al.*

Brown Honeyeater - 6+, 19/5/96, Killagurra Gorge, N of Durba Hills (Wiluna) - MC * 6+, 20/5/96, Durba Hills (Wiluna) - MC

Clamorous Reed-Warbler - 1, 11/7/96, Dragon Tree Soak (Kiriji Ba Yadula) (Broome) - MBa

Golden-headed Cisticola - 2, 11/7/96, Dragon Tree Soak (Kiriji Ba Yadula) (Broome) - MBa

KIMBERLEY

Black Swan - 1, 21/5/96, Argyle diamonds mine alluvial tailings dam (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - FO

Great-billed Heron - 1, 6/5/96, Talbot Bay, Buccaneer Archipelago (Derby - West Kimberley) - KC * 1, 23/5/96, Camden Harbour, Kuri Bay area (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - KC * 1, 24/5/96, Munster Water, Prince Regent River area (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - KC

Nankeen Night Heron - 150, 24/6/96, Marlu Billabong, Parry Lagoons (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - CN, WN

Letter-winged Kite - 1, 2/6/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - SN *et al.* * 1, 40 km W of Lake Gregory (Halls Creek) - SN *et al.*

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, 9/5/96, near Argyle diamond mine tailings dam (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - FO

Grey Goshawk - 1 white phase, 11/5/96, near Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - Rob Fairclough per FO

Red Goshawk - 2, 10/6/96, Pantijan Station (Derby - West Kimberley) - Frank Harrap per SN * 1, 11/6 96, Pantijan Station (Derby - West Kimberley) - SN *et al.* * 1, 16/6/96, Ellenbrae Station (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - SN *et al.*

Chestnut Rail - 1, 25/5/96, Prince Regent River (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - KC * 6, 28/5/96, Hunter River (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - KC

Bush Stone-curlew - 1, 12/7/96, Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - Margaret Morrison per FO

Rufous Owl - 2, 21/5/96, Sale River (Derby - West Kimberley) - KC

Barn Owl - 1, 11/5/96, Argyle diamond mine village (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - FO

Purple-crowned Fairy-wren - 8-10, 17/6/96, Miner's Pool, Drysdale River (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - CN, WN

Black Grasswren - 4, 21/5/96, Sale River (Derby - West Kimberley) - KC * 6, 19/6/96, Mitchell Falls campsite (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - CN, WN

Green-backed Gerygone - 1, 5/96, Ningbing Ranges (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - NMCK (scarce in the East Kimberley)

Gouldian Finch - 6, 20/6/96, Miner's Pool, Drysdale River (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - CN, WN

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Purple-backed Starling - 1 male, 4/6/96 - G&GG - see lead article in this issue

COCOS-KEELING ISLANDS

Probable **Green Junglefowl** - 7/12/95, West Island - KC (introduced to West Is last century, but thought to be extinct (HANZAB)) (possibly re-introduced)

OBSERVERS

AC = Alan Clarke	KL = Kim-Chye Lim
AH = Alex Hollick	LD = Liz Davies
BBa = Bryan Barrett	MBa = Mike Bamford
CB = Craig Boase	MBr = Mike Brooker
ChD = Charlie Davies	MC = Michael Craig
CN = Clive Napier	MCl = Margery Clegg

CNe = Clive Nealon

DC = Dave Crossley

DL = David Lamont

FO = Frank O'Connor

GA = George Agar

G&GG = Gwen & Graham Goodreid

GM = Glenn Moore

GMa = Gabriel Magyar

JC = Jan Crossley

JD = John Darnell

KC = Kevin Coate

MG = Mrs Goldsmith

MS = Marcus Singor

NMcK = Norm McKenzie

PC = Peter Collins

RP = Ross Payton

SM = Sue Milne

SN = Simon Nevill

SS = Steve Strike

TK = Tony Kirkby

WN = Wendy Napier

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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**—a copy on disk of word processed documents would assist, especially if in WordPerfect or MS Word format. A style sheet is available from Perry House to guide writers regarding format
- 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 1996
at Perry House

WA Group Reports

RAOU (WA GROUP) COMMITTEE

Meetings of the WA Group Committee are held on the third Wednesday of each month at Perry House.

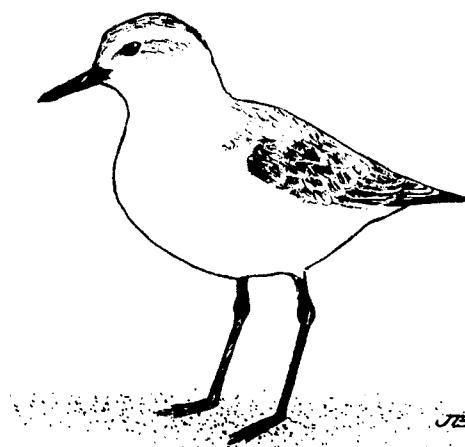
It is through the committee that the business of the RAOU (WA Group) is managed. Matters for consideration by the committee should be communicated to the office with adequate time for distribution to committee members.

Recent committee meetings have dealt with the following:

- Birds on Farms Project — this project is now moving, after the recent visit by Geoff Barrett, the HQ project coordinator. Brenda Newbey has been appointed as the WA Group coordinator and it is hoped that a funding submission to the National Save the Bush Program will be approved. In the meantime, the WA Group has allocated sufficient funds to start the project off.
- Survey of Suburban Birds Project — Clive Nealon is preparing a report for the RAOU HQ Research Committee; 135 sites are now covered, with 20 000 records.
- Hooded Plover Project — this major project has been completed and a report is included as the supplement to this edition of WABN. However, the WA Group will continue to monitor this species in an attempt to increase our knowledge and to protect the bird's major habitats.
- Conservation issues:
Wellard Wetlands — nesting boxes are being set up and arrangements made for regular surveys for Alcoa;
City of South Perth — dogs around South Perth wetlands;
City of Canning — foreshore litter and water quality on the Canning River;
Roebuck Bay, Broome — concerns expressed about a lack of protection for the bay, with current problems including possible diamond mining, resort development, 4WD access to beaches, and helicopters flying low along beaches;
awaiting draft or final management plans for Amarillo Pool, Karnup, the Lake Muir wetlands and Bungendore Park.
- Threatened Bird Network — discussions will be held with Michael Fendley of HQ re the formation of a WA Group sub-committee to tackle problems of Regional Threatened Species.
- Eyre and Broome Bird Observatories — the RAOU Council is monitoring the operations of all observatories in an endeavour to make them more financially viable and our Chairman is a member of this HQ sub-committee.
- RAOU Council Representation — Clive Napier has now replaced Brian Wilson as Council Secretary, enabling the WA Group to continue to have a voice on Council.
- Independent Incorporation — the WA Group is seeking Council approval as incorporation in WA would enable applications for grants for more than \$5000 to assist in meeting costs of projects within the state.

- Finances — due to structural changes in banking charges, WA Group banking is now done through Westpac and not ANZ.
- Trading Table — Clive Nealon is arranging for displays/sales of Christmas cards at the Combined Charities Card Shop, a good income earner for the WA Group; stalls are also being set up at *Spring Fling* in Bold Park, *Talk to the Animals Expo* at Ascot and wildflower exhibitions at Mullewa and Busselton. Many country agents continue to service their local card outlets and this results in significant profits for our Group.
- Swan Catchment Centre — Bryan Barrett is liaising with the Swan Working Group regarding RAOU representation at the centre which is partly funded by the National Landcare Program. The centre is based at the old Fisheries building opposite the Hyatt Centre, with the aim of providing a focus for supporting community involvement in integrated management of the Swan-Canning Catchment; the RAOU has been requested to provide information on bird populations and may set up displays.
- Conservation Council Affiliation — Dr Nick Dunlop and Ms Darryl James have been appointed as our delegates to this body.
- Revision of *Birding Sites Around Perth* by Ron van Delft — sponsors are being sought to cover costs of preparing the revision, eg. graphics and mapping and computer work to prepare the text for publication; a suggestion has been made of \$20 per page, with larger amounts to be sought from BankWest (previous sponsor) and Perth local councils.
- Healthway Funding Application — \$1000 received towards education, promotion and walks is to be spent on a telescope for Group use.

Clive Napier, Chairman



A Sanderling From Woodman Point, where this species of wader is commonly seen.

Drawn: Judy Blyth

WADER MOVEMENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Further to the request made in the September 1995 issue of *WA Bird Notes*, we report that 14 members took part in recording wader movements. From these reports we had 476 records taken from 34 different wetlands between Esperance in the south to Lake Argyle in the north.

Undoubtedly the best indication of wader usage of the various sites monitored came from members who were able to visit their sites more than four times. Therefore, the best records we received were from six or more visits. A single visit to an area can only record the presence at the time of the visit and gives no indication as to whether birds were resident or passing through the area. Some members reported when their wetlands became dry — this was helpful as it indicated the fact that the birds had had to move on.

We feel sure that some people have records of birds seen during the migratory season but, for various reasons, have not forwarded them to the office. We do urge people to check their notes and let us know what they saw, when and where and, if possible, how many of each species were seen. Forms can be obtained by ringing the RAOU office on 09 383 7749.

The scheme was devised to give members an additional interest throughout the year and has the blessing of both the WA Committee and the Wader Study Group. It is hoped to continue the project for the next two years and in so doing we hope to gain greater knowledge of both our migratory waders and those which are resident within the State.

Bryan Barrett, Organizer

SUBURBAN BIRD SURVEY

The survey has started well and the records coming in have provided a good beginning for the database. My thanks to all those people who have submitted records already. I hope that your observations will continue to arrive and that you will encourage others to respond to the call. Remember that record submission is not restricted to RAOU members. If you know anyone who is interested in birds, and would recognise a Malleefowl if one turned up in the garden, then you have identified a potential recruit.

There is still a lot of the metropolitan area that remains to be covered.

Over the first few months of the survey one main lesson has been learned. I expect that there will be more, but the sooner the lessons learned can be incorporated into the procedures to be followed, the better the results should be for the survey.

So what have we learned so far?

The first lesson has been that the initial instructions for recording observations were too involved. To address that, let me suggest that:

- you should consider the observation period to be a week;
- everybody should record observations from Saturday to Friday (inclusive) each week;
- each bird seen during the week should be indicated on the form with a 'tick';
- the use of 'O' to indicate that the bird was seen on other than the prime observation day should be discontinued;
- you continue to use the 'F' to indicate that the bird was in flight when observed.

I will also answer some other questions that have been raised to try to clarify some areas that perhaps weren't

addressed in the initial instructions.

- Can I put down records of birds that I have heard but not seen?
- Yes, if you are confident with your identification of the sound. We need the records to be reliable, but some birds, for example, the Boobook Owl, are far more often heard than seen.
- Do you really want records from my garden? Hardly any birds come to visit.
- Yes, please send in records of the birds that you do see. What doesn't occur in a given area may be equally as interesting as what does.
- Should I try to distinguish between birds flying over, feeding, like swallows, and those that are clearly going somewhere?
- No, just record birds flying over with the 'F' on the observation sheet. The main thing about these records is that the birds were there.
- If I'm out driving and notice something unusual, should I report it? After all, it's not in an area I'm surveying regularly.
- Yes, report any sightings that you consider noteworthy, wherever they are. These sightings will be registered as 'Incidental' records. If the sighting does take place while you're driving, just make sure you can identify where you are so that the sighting can be registered to the correct location. Also send in the report, preferably on a separate form, marked 'Incidental'.

I promised that I would try to report in each issue of WABN on progress to date.

I have incorporated my own records of sightings within the metropolitan area over the last year and this has provided a large number of the records. I have also received records of regular site visits for some other sites that go back over an extended period. These may prove useful for a comparison over time of these sites. If anybody has similar records for sites or gardens over previous years I would appreciate the opportunity to include them in the database.

Up to the end of July, there are records from 73 different observers. The records cover a total of 145 locations, 35 of which are associated with 'Incidentals'. There are now records for 69 gardens and 41 other sites, for example, reserves and lakes, and so on.

The locations have been plotted against the maps contained in the 'UBD Street Directory, 38th Edition 1996' and we have reports from 76 of the 290 maps that currently constitute the metropolitan area. This means we are covering little more than a quarter of the metropolitan area. We clearly need to extend the coverage a great deal.

So far, the database contains about 20,000 individual bird records spread across 174 species. Twenty-three species are only represented by a single record. The Australian Raven is the most recorded species, with 933 records.

Clive Nealon

BIRDS ON FARMS PROJECT

The Atlas of Australian Birds and the Australian Bird Count were national RAOU projects which have been very successful in documenting the distribution, status and movements of Australian birds. As a result, the RAOU determined to begin a similar, equally challenging national project that involves surveying birds in different habitats on

farms, and funds were raised for a pilot Birds on Farms project.

The broad aims of the project are to:

- examine the degree of success of revegetation programs in bringing birds back into rural areas;
- identify the factors which are responsible for maintaining bird diversity on farms, such as the minimum amount of tree and shrub cover;
- identify bird species which are declining under current land management practices and indicate how these species may be conserved in rural areas.

The project has a national coordinator, Geoff Barrett, working at RAOU headquarters in Hawthorn. The Western Australian coordinator is Brenda Newbey, who will have the assistance of a small steering committee here in Western Australia. The project will use the data sheets developed by Geoff, and he and Brenda have already been into the field together to confirm that the approach can be easily adapted to Western Australian conditions.

Because of Mullewa's excellent record in conservation, the Mullewa Wildflower Show (beginning on Sunday 25 August) was chosen by the RAOU as the place to launch the WA part of this exciting national project.

Birds On Farms will depend on the participation of willing farmers and birdwatchers, and its outcome should be of mutual benefit to farm productivity and local birdlife. There are indications that with careful management of remnant bushland and revegetated areas, at least 80% of Australia's rural bird species can survive in farming areas. Native birds are a key to rural tree health as they harvest leaf-eating insects, probably removing between 50 and 70% of the insects from farm trees. Birds are excellent 'indicator species' of the overall health of farming properties and the success of efforts to make farming ecologically sustainable.

The RAOU's BOF survey aims to look at the degree of success of revegetation programs in bringing birds back into rural areas. Any farm is suitable and useful to the survey. For farmers who would like to offer their farm for the survey but are too busy to record the birds on their property (once each season over a two year period), the RAOU can link them with experienced birdwatchers who are willing to do the survey.

Participants in the BOF survey will be informed of the progress of the project through a regular Birds on Farms Newsletter, Wingspan, and WA Bird Notes. At the end of the study, a final report outlining major findings and recommendations will be published. The project should become a significant contribution to the National Decade of Landcare which has the goal of achieving sustainable land use (continued productivity without the loss of flora and fauna) by the year 2000.

The RAOU invites you to take part in this important project coordinating landcare and conservation. If you know of a farm whose owners may like it to be included in the survey, or if you want to be one of the bird surveyors, fill in the form on the Birds on Farms leaflet enclosed and send it to Birds on Farms — RAOU (WA Group) office. For further information phone Brenda Newbey on 09 337 5673.

Geoff Barrett and John Blyth

DATABASE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRDS

The Department of Environment Protection has recently been negotiating with the RAOU over access to data from sites for which we have records in the System 6 area, for use

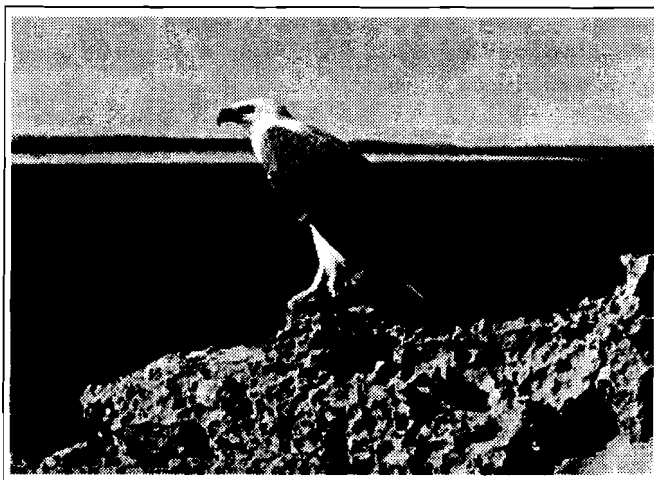
in their review and update of the System 6 proposals. This illustrates the growing importance of the database, so please keep the information rolling in.

New data cards are being printed at present, and will be available shortly. The names and order of species are those in the latest RAOU Checklist. The new cards include all bird species known from Western Australia, with the exception of a few species which sometimes occur as escapees but are not established, and a small number of very rare vagrants. If I have missed something you think I should have included on the list, please let me know!

Production of the cards has been made possible with assistance from the Gordon Reid Foundation for Conservation.

Allan Burbidge

Members' Contributions



A White-bellied Sea-Eagle photographed in the Monte Bello islands by new WA Group member, Ian Gale

BABBLER BEHAVIOUR

During August 1995 Margery and I drove north to Darwin and after leaving Kununurra we made an overnight stop at the Mary River crossing. Having set up camp we went for a walk along the river and in so doing passed through the territory of a group of Grey-crowned Babblers busy doing what babblers do best; that is, foraging among the low scrub. I realise that strictly speaking this report comes from the Northern Territory. However, the species is common to both States and their subsequent behaviour was something that I had not previously seen in Australia.

Some time later I returned along the same track to see what, from a distance, appeared to be a group of fighting birds. Closer inspection, however, revealed the babblers enjoying a dust bath. They had found a shallow depression in the bank of the river partially filled with fine dry dust. The hollow was wide enough to allow two or three birds to scrabble around in its base at the same time and they were so engrossed in what they were doing that I was able to get to within a dozen paces of them. The birds at the bottom were actually rolling in the dust and making a great effort to get it right through their

feathers. They then hopped out and shook and preened on the bank while others took their place. I was able to note that each bird returned to the dust on more than one occasion.

I have in the past seen the common House Sparrow dusting in the UK but this was the first time I had seen it done in Australia. No doubt other observation have been made. The question is: why do they do it? Is it to rid their feathers of ticks or mites, or is the dust beneficial to their feathers? And do other species have a similar habit?

In conclusion, I recall a series of articles published in the UK some 20 years ago on the subject of 'anting' where birds were seen to place ants in their feathers and under their wings. Do any members know whether this behaviour is common to Australian species and, if so, which?

Bryan Barrett

A TALE OF TWO TEAL

On 8 April 1996 at Wellstead Estuary, Bremer Bay, I saw a flock of 150 male Chestnut Teal, together with at least 120 female Chestnut Teal, roosting on rocks jutting into the estuary. One hundred metres away, there was another flock of 200 ducks, all Grey Teal, roosting on the beach sand. Between these two well-segregated flocks were Australian Shelduck and Pacific Black Ducks.

Mary Bremner

WESTERN BOWERBIRD

On the morning on 24 April 1996 at 8 am while walking upstream along the dry bed of Tabba Tabba Creek located 50 km east of Port Hedland, Glen Carruthers and Chris Hassell saw two Western Bowerbirds (*Chlamydera guttata*) flying away from a low spreading tree. I am familiar with the Great Bowerbird (*Chlamydera nuchalis*) and have seen Spotted Bowerbird (*Chlamydera maculata*) in the Eastern States. Glen Carruthers has filmed Spotted Bowerbirds at a bower.

The birds were a lot smaller than Great Bowerbirds, had dark head and throat, with beautiful golden/buff spotting on the head, throat, mantle and upper wing coverts. On sandy ground under the tree we found a bower. The area in front and to one side of the bower appeared to have been heavily used. The bower was decorated with broken clear and green glass, a silver can ring-pull and some fresh green berries. We lightly rearranged the decorations and sat five metres away from the bower. After five minutes one bird returned to the bower and moved some of the glass and then flew off. It returned a few minutes later and the other bird joined it. The second bird approached much more cautiously; and was possibly the female. Both birds stayed close to the bower for about three minutes but no courtship was observed. Both birds then left and didn't return during the further 30 minutes we waited.

Chris Hassell

Editors Note: This record is very close to the northern limit of distribution for this species, given by Storr (1984) as the lower De Grey River. The presence of a bower suggests that breeding may occur in this area.

Reference:

Storr, G.M. 1984. Birds of the Pilbara Region, Western Australia. *Records of the Western Australian Museum Supplement No. 16.*

COCKATOOS AND RAVENS IN THE GARDEN

On 9 May 1996 at suburban Wembley at 8 am a noisy flock of Short-billed Black-Cockatoos (13) landed on the hard-shelled almond tree but soon registered their disgust as there were only about six nuts left for the picking. They immediately flew across to the Queensland Umbrella Tree (*Brassaia actinophylla*) which is now covered in long spikes of juicy red fruits.

As each cockatoo gained its prize it flew across to the house roof to devour the berry. Immediately three Ravens pursued them onto the roof; the berry was dropped and a Raven devoured the berry. The cockatoos then flew back to the Umbrella Tree then back to the roof until both cockatoos and Ravens had had their fill.

Ravens certainly enjoy the fruits of the backyard garden and are often seen flying off with a juicy orange or sitting on the mulberry tree having a feast. They have never been seen on the Umbrella Tree although they obviously enjoy the berries. Is this because they are unable to balance on the frangible vegetation?

Mary Bremner

WADERS AT WOODMAN POINT

The RAOU conducted several wader counts between 1981 and 1990. These were the Wader Study Project from 1981 to 1985 and the Australasian Wader Studies Group Regular Counts Project, 1986 to 1990. A range of different wader habitats around Australia were selected and these sites were counted on a regular basis to determine migratory movements. The findings were published in the final report of the regular counts project 1981-1990, titled "Wader Movements in Australia" (Alcorn *et al.*, 1994).

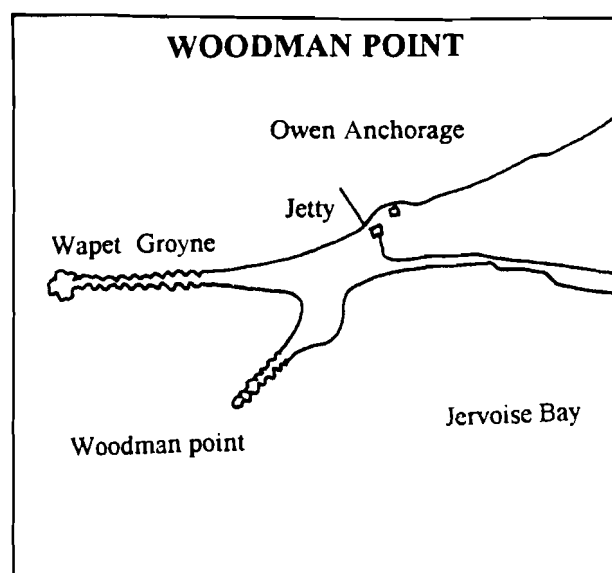


Figure 1: Location of wader counts at Woodman Point

One of the sites selected was Woodman Point, classified as a sandy beach wader site. Monthly counts were held at Woodman Point from July 1983 to June 1984 (excluding August) and further in January 1986, November/December 1988 and February 1989. The findings for 1983-89 are summarised in Table 1.

Species	Relative Abundance
Pied Oystercatcher	common
Sooty Oystercatcher	vagrant
Grey Plover	common
Red-kneed Dotterel	uncommon
Lesser Sand Plover	rare
Greater Sand Plover	vagrant
Red-capped Plover	common
Black-winged Stilt	absent
Banded Stilt	rare
Red-necked Avocet	uncommon
Ruddy Turnstone	common
Whimbrel	vagrant
Grey-tailed Tattler	rare
Common Sandpiper	rare
Common Greenshank	absent
Terek Sandpiper	rare
Bar-tailed Godwit	rare
Red Knot	uncommon
Great Knot	common
Red-necked Stint	uncommon
Curlew Sandpiper	vagrant
Sanderling	common
Broad-billed Sandpiper	vagrant

Table 1: Relative abundance of waders at Woodman Point from RAOU counts in 1983/84.

Some twelve years after the initial counts, I conducted a comparative survey of waders at Woodman Point. The intention was to see if any substantial changes had taken place and to compare data. Counts commenced in May 1995 and ceased in May 1996. All counts were conducted in the morning, just after sunrise and made at least twice a month. Early visits facilitated accurate counts and avoided unwanted wader movement due to disturbances.

In total, 36 counts were conducted. Counting was commenced at the Cockburn Cement works at the end of Woodman Point View and followed the beach along Owen Anchorage out to the small plateau at the end of Wapet Groyne, then back along the seaweed covered beach to Woodman Point (Fig. 1). The survey continued along the rocky shoreline facing Jervoise Bay and finished opposite the Cement works. Generally this took about an hour to an hour and a half.

Woodman Point

Woodman Point is located on the coast 10 kilometres south of Fremantle at Latitude 32° 08' S and Longitude 115° 44' E. The Woodman Point Nature Reserve and recreational reserve are both regular RAOU excursion sites and well known to members.

Considerable changes have taken place since the first surveys were conducted. The coastal strip behind Woodman Point now contains new residential areas that front onto the recreational reserve. Around Jervoise Bay the expansion of the ship building and ship servicing industry has turned Cockburn Sound into an important industrial area. Recreational pressures have increased during the last decade. Four-wheel drive vehicles in particular are causing considerable damage to Woodman Point.

Comparison of counts

The present survey registered 17 species compared with the results of the 1983-1989 wader counts which identified 21 species. This does not indicate a reduction in the number of species, however, because the earlier survey was much longer and we would expect more species to have been seen over the longer period. Wader sightings for the period 1983-1989 were given abundance ratings from vagrant to common (Table 1). Most species maintained their status in 1995-96, although the Red Knot and Red-kneed Dotterel, previously rated as uncommon, were conspicuous by their absence from the 1995-96 counts. Waders sighted rarely or as vagrants in 1983-1989 but absent in 1995-1996 were Lesser Sand Plover, Banded Stilt, Whimbrel and Broad-billed Sandpiper. The Common Greenshank and Black-winged Stilt were present in 1995-1996 but absent in the previous counts.

Two wader species have been reported from Woodman Point but did not show up in either of the surveys. The Hooded Plover is mentioned in historical records (Newbey 1996) and one Asian Dowitcher was reported for 25 November 1995 by Peter Sandilands (Sandilands 1996). The Double-banded Plover has also been reported, but this record is considered doubtful (see WABN 69, 4).

Species accounts

The highest numbers of species were recorded in November and December, and the lowest in June (Fig. 2). Highest numbers of individuals were in November-December and April (Figure 3). The high April count was due to an influx of Great Knots (see below and Fig. 4). The following comments should be read in the context of the 1995-1996 observations. Bar graphs showing the pattern of occurrence are shown for several species (Fig. 4).

Pied Oystercatcher: Present all year round. Numbers peaked in August and April. Often found foraging along the Jervoise Bay beach. This is a quiet beach outside the area counted. Pied Oystercatchers were seen feeding on a sandbank, rich in cockles, north of Wapet Groyne. The sandbank was visible at low tides. (maximum number: 7) (maximum number at Jervoise Bay: 11)

Sooty Oystercatcher: Sighted mainly in winter. (maximum number: 1)

Grey Plover: The Grey Plover remained on site throughout the year with a couple of birds over-wintering. They liked to shelter among the dunes during inclement weather. The first migratory Grey Plovers appeared at Woodman Point in early September still showing parts of their black breeding plumage. They were easily recognised as the new arrivals. (maximum number: 13)

Greater Sand Plover: This species visited Woodman Point from late September till December. It was usually found in the presence of Red-capped Plovers. It favoured the open sandy beach areas well above the high tide line. (maximum number: 3)

Red-capped Plover: One of the residential waders. Numbers started to increase from October and peaked during December and January. Red-capped Plovers were often seen roosting high up on the beach where some vegetation was present. They have been sheltering in tire track impressions. (maximum number: 18)

Black-winged Stilt: A small party was sighted at the Owen Anchorage beach in early February 1996. Three adults and twelve immature birds were seen resting on the beach. They were possibly on the move because the lakes on the Swan Coastal Plain were drying out fast at that time. (maximum number: 15)

Red-necked Avocet: One observation in February of a small group flying past. (maximum number: 9)

Ruddy Turnstone: Turnstones increased in numbers from September onwards and were most numerous from November through to January. Not seen in July. Small groups were found feeding on seaweed banks and along the rocky shore line. (maximum number: 23)

Red-necked Stint: On site from August till April. Most common before Christmas; after that numbers dropped off. Red-necked Stints presumably moved to the mudflats of the drying lakes on the Swan Coastal Plain where they became increasingly common as summer progressed and feeding areas expanded. A few sightings were made of solitary stints during the winter months August 1995 and June 1996. (maximum number: 27)

Curlew Sandpiper: Only two observations: one bird in October and one in April. (maximum number: 1)

Sanderling: "The" beach wader by definition. Numbers slowly built up from September onwards peaking in November and then gradually decreased towards April. Juveniles were present

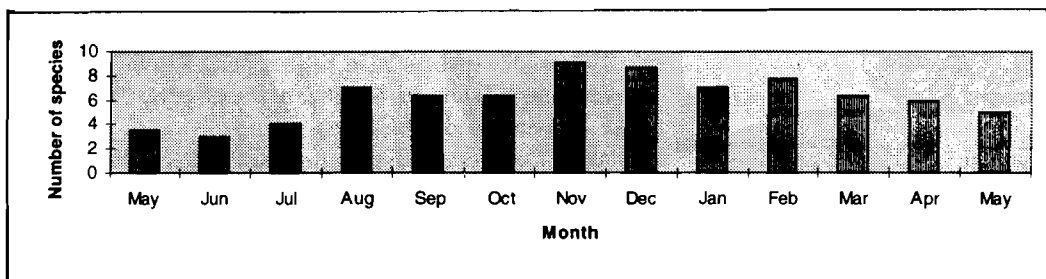


Figure 2: Average number of species of wader per count each month at Woodman Point, 1985/86.

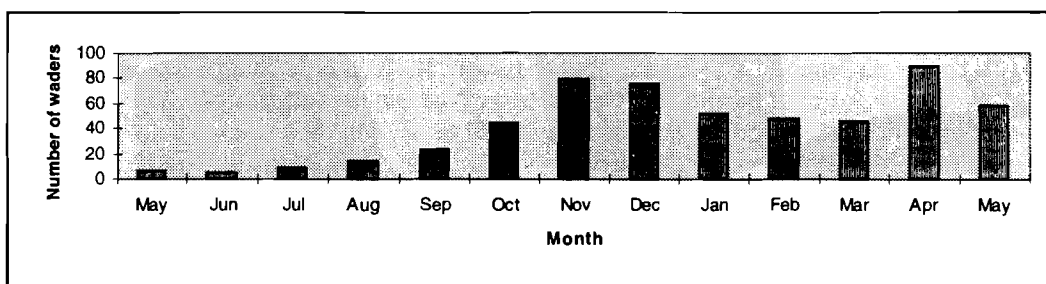


Figure 3: Average numbers of waders per count each month at Woodman Point, 1985/86.

Grey-tailed Tattler: Absent in October and April. Found sheltering behind seaweed banks in blustery conditions. Fed along the beach, on seaweed banks and in rocky areas. Usually solitary but a few observations were made of two and three Tattlers. (maximum number: 3)

Common Sandpiper: Only one sighting, in October. More sightings were expected. At nearby Point Peron which has similar coastal habitat several Common Sandpipers were present throughout the season from August to March. (maximum number: 1).

Terek Sandpiper: One sighting in November. Many Terek Sandpiper sightings in the Perth metropolitan area are made from late October to early November. This sighting falls within that period. (maximum number: 1)

Bar-tailed Godwit: Arrived in November and departed in January. Present in small numbers. (maximum number: 7)

Great Knot: First appeared in November. Small numbers remained present during summer. A peak occurred at the end of April and early May when large groups were seen, some in partial breeding plumage. A notable winter observation was of 46 Great Knots by Tony Kirkby at Woodman Point on 2 July 1994 (WABN 71, September 1994). (maximum number: 64)

among the first arrivals. Dispersed to the beaches around Cockburn Sound. In June 1996 an over-wintering Sanderling was showing partial breeding plumage. (maximum number: 27)

Greenshank: Present at Woodman Point in March. Seen at the end of Wapet Groyne where it fed and roosted. (maximum number: 1)

M. Singor

References:

- Alcorn, M., Alcorn, R. and Fleming, M. 1994. Wader movements in Australia *RAOU Report* No. 94.
 Newbey, B. 1996. Hooded Plovers in Western Australia to 31 May 1994. *Western Australian Bird Notes* 77, 11-15.
 Sandilands, P. 1996. Asian Dowitcher. *Western Australian Bird Notes* 78, 6.

UPDATE ON NIGHT PARROTS

As most members of the RAOU will know, CALM has recently completed an interim recovery plan for this least known of all Australian parrots, and is conducting a public campaign to gain information about possible sightings.

Over thirty reports have now been received and field outings (including the WA Group's own Easter Campout this

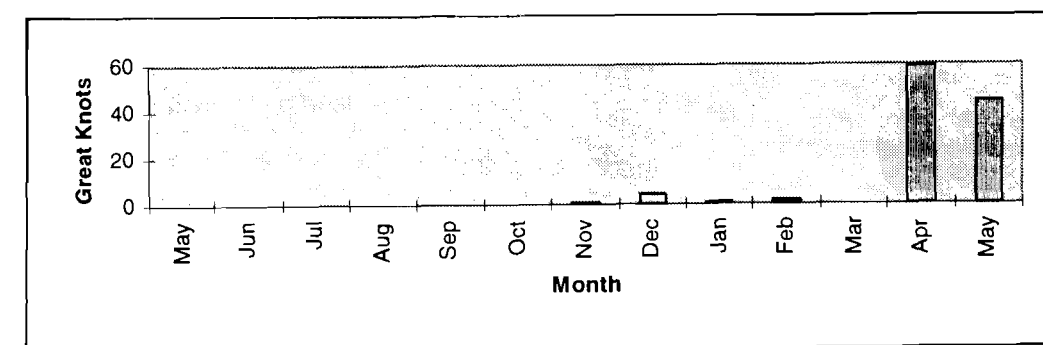
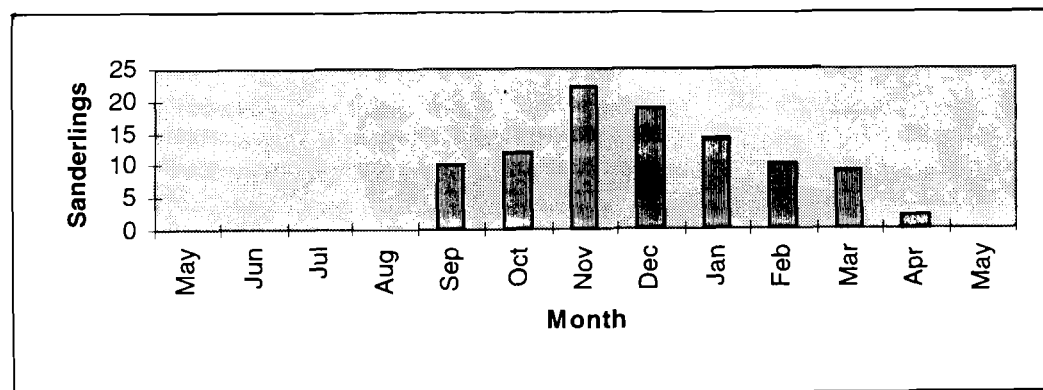
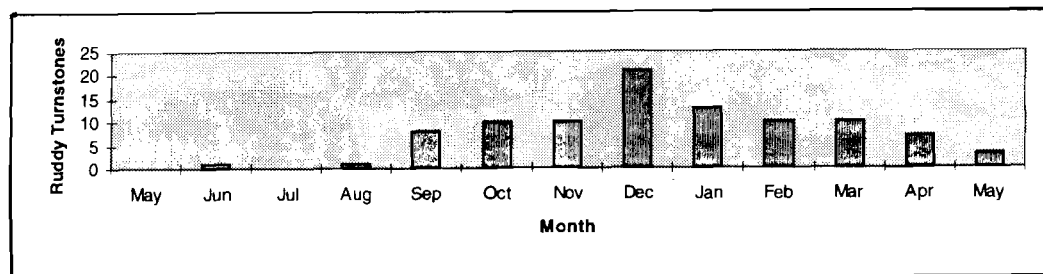
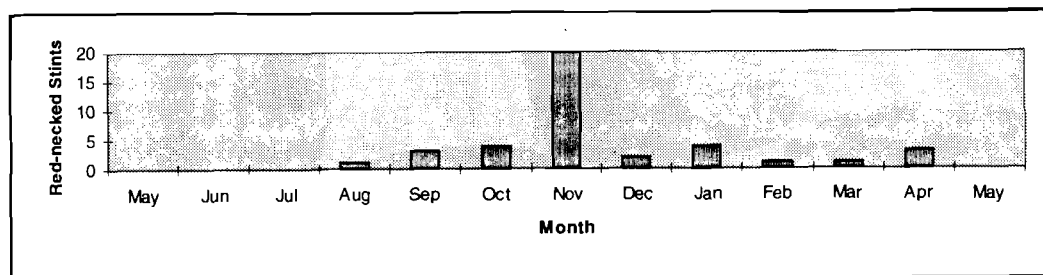
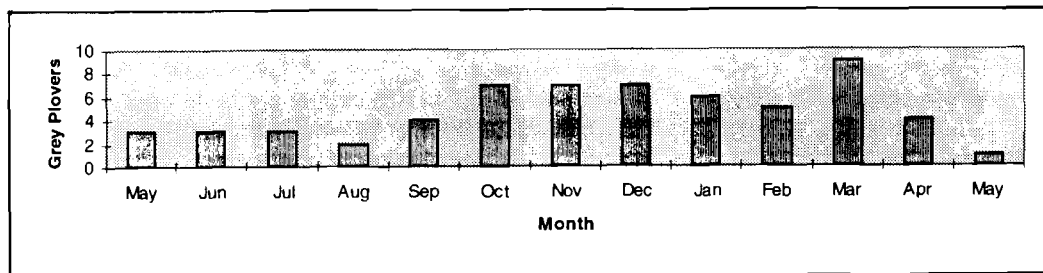
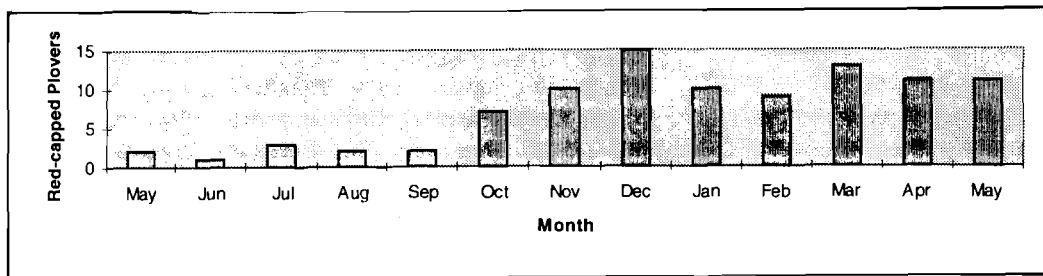


Figure 4: Average numbers of individuals of six waders per count each month at Woodman Point, 1985/86.

year) have been conducted to four places from which one or more such reports have come. These field trips are discussed below.

Maranalgo Station near Paynes Find. In May 1995, just prior to circulation of the CALM leaflet, John Blyth, Judy Blyth and Phil Fuller visited the station within a few days of a report of Night Parrots being seen. The birds which were the subject of the report were positively identified, with the original observers, as Elegant Parrots. There was little obvious Night Parrot habitat on the areas inspected.

Burnerbinmar Station, between Paynes Find and Yalgoo. In August 1995, following response to the CALM leaflet from the leasee, Don Anderson, John Blyth and Judy Blyth spent five days with about ten hours spotlighting around the area of the reported sighting. A patch of good spinifex, of a few tens of hectares in extent, near to extensive granite outcrops, probably would have been adequate habitat for Night Parrots. Elegant Parrots were common on the property fairly near the reported point of sighting. Mr Anderson, now CALM's caretaker for the property, remains convinced he had seen Night Parrots.

Lake King chain of lakes. Following six reports from around the lake system between Lake King and Holt Rock, including reported sightings in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, 80s and 90s, two trips were conducted in 1996.

(i) January, 1996. John Blyth and Judy Blyth spent ten days in the area camped at Lake Gulson and doing about ten hours spotlighting. Samphire/saltbush/*Sclerolaena* etc. occurs over the whole system (probably thousands of hectares), but much of it is relatively sparse and showing what appears to be effects of grazing, especially by rabbits.

(ii) Easter 1996, RAOU Campout at Lake Gulson. Three nights of spotlighting by six or seven vehicles, each with two spotlights, were conducted of samphire/saltbush at Lakes Gulson, King, Varley, Hurlstone and Carmody. Many foxes and rabbits and several cats were seen. Many small groups of Elegant Parrots were seen during the day, including, in January, birds feeding in late afternoon in samphire vegetation. However, Elegant Parrots were never seen at night by the spotlight.

Maroubra Station, north of Beacon. This was visited by John Blyth, John Dell and Perry de Rebiere in response to two reported sightings by kangaroo shooter Gary Johnson. Gary saw a 'mottled greenish' bird in the spotlight at almost the same place at 10:30 pm at the end of October 1995 and the end of March 1996. Three days and nights were spent, including six hours of spotlighting with two spotlights, and mist-netting around a tank near the point of reported sightings. Considerable areas of good samphire/*Sclerolaena* were present, with occasional very dense patches of a few square metres, around parts of Lake Moore and adjoining claypans. We did not see any Elegant Parrots, but one pair of Mulga Parrots was seen in open woodland. We did not see foxes or cats and although signs of rabbits were everywhere, relatively few were seen.

In addition to the above, John and Judy Blyth spent a fortnight on Mount Elvire Station (now State Forest) west of Menzies, in July/August 1995, including probably ten hours of spotlighting, and about 20 hours walking through and searching samphire areas during the day. The trip was not based on previous reports of Night Parrots, but good samphire was found to be common over wide areas around the edges of Lake

Barlee and adjacent smaller, less saline samphire wetlands. No Elegant Parrots were seen but occasional Mulga Parrots occurred in nearby mulga woodland.

No sightings of Night Parrots have yet been confirmed, although only one report has actually been proved to be in error. Not surprisingly, the searches so far have been very much like looking for a needle in a haystack. If the Night Parrot is largely solitary, especially outside the breeding season, and if numbers are as low as we expect, the sorts of searches we have so far conducted depend greatly on good fortune. That is, on such things as disturbing the one samphire patch out of many thousands in which a Night Parrot happens to be hiding, or covering in a night of spotlighting the few hectares out of many thousands in which Night Parrots may be feeding. This experience has confirmed the idea that where possible searches should be based on surveillance at isolated watering points in an otherwise dry area.

All of the field outings so far have been confined to the southern Goldfields and the Wheatbelt. Consistent with the interim recovery plan CALM is planning to conduct an expedition later this year to a more remote region, around the eastern Pilbara and Rudall River area, traditionally considered to be among the strongholds of the Night Parrot. Coincidentally, a very recent, and rather convincing report of two Night Parrots has come from east of the Rudall River National Park on the Canning Stock Route. An exact position is available for this report and we will try to include the area in the planned field trip.

Given the secretive nature of this species, the vast areas of potential habitat still available, and the likelihood that numbers anywhere will be small, many more trips may still be needed before the Night Parrot's survival is confirmed. Once one or more populations are found, the tasks of studying the species, clarifying its conservation status, identifying any processes threatening it and ensuring its conservation can begin in earnest.

John Blyth

TREATY SPECIES AT LAKE MCLARTY

In the article on Lake McLarty in the last issue (WABN 78, 10-13) we inadvertently left out information about species listed in two international treaties: the Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (JAMBA) and the China Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (CAMBA).

A total of 21 JAMBA species and 23 CAMBA species have been recorded at Lake McLarty. This puts Lake McLarty as the fourth highest ranking wetland for these species in south-western Australia, after Alfred Cove (30 JAMBA, 30 CAMBA species), Peel Inlet (26, 28) and Vasse-Wonnerup (23, 26). These three sites are all estuarine, so Lake McLarty is the highest ranking non-estuarine site for these species in the south-west.

This further emphasises the very high conservation value of this wetland.

Allan Burbidge and Mike Craig

MORE ON LAKE MCLARTY

The following notes from my observations add to the information in the article by Allan Burbidge and Mike Craig on Lake McLarty in the last issue (WABN 78, 10-13).

120 Musk Ducks were recorded at Lake McLarty during the RAOU excursion on 3 March 1990. This number is

significantly higher than that previously reported. This number is locally, if not regionally, significant.

On 21 March 1992, I recorded a Red-capped Plover nest with two eggs. This is an additional breeding record for this species.

Jack Hunt, Chris Wilder and I counted 30+ Black-fronted Dotterels at Lake McLarty on 27 March 1992. This count is slightly higher than that previously reported. More interestingly, Jack Hunt and I saw two adults and two juveniles at McLarty on 23 January 1994. The adults were chasing a Sacred Kingfisher away from the young birds. It is not known for certain, but these birds may have bred at McLarty. This species has not previously been recorded breeding at this site.

On 2 April 1989, Jack Hunt and I saw 125 Caspian Terns at Lake McLarty. This appears to be the highest count of Caspian Terns at a wetland in south-western Australia, and is therefore a regionally significant number. The previously highest count in the south-west appears to be 80 in the Peel-Harvey system (Lane *et al.* 1996).

Ian Standring

Reference:

Lane, J., Jaensch, R. and Lynch, R. 1996. Western Australia. pp. 759-943 in ANCA, *A Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia*. 2nd ed, ANCA, Canberra.

Editors' Note: If any other members have information from Lake McLarty, especially breeding records, which adds to that published in this or the last issue of WABN, we would be pleased to hear about it.

THE WHITE MARINER

The evening news is frequently interspersed with short human and natural interest stories. Such was the case on Saturday, 22 June 1996, when Channel Seven showed an evening news clip of sharks in a feeding frenzy. The story showed a dead whale floating north of Perth with the emphasis being on the feeding sharks. However, the sharks were not the only scavengers present; a large flock of seabirds was also feasting on the whale.

What had caught my attention was a large white bird which looked like a white phase of the Southern Giant-Petrel but the story had finished before I could take a second look. A copy of the newsclip was duly requested from Channel Seven who were kind enough to provide all their footage which allowed closer scrutiny.

The Southern Giant-Petrel is polymorphic which means it has more than one colour phase. Around Perth beaches it is reasonably common during the winter months, especially after storms. Cockburn Sound is one area where they can be found after a winter's gale. Juvenile birds are most often sighted and these are completely dark brown. To the best of my knowledge the white morph is rarely sighted at these latitudes.

The tape exceeded all expectations and confirmed my earlier suspicion that it was in fact an adult white morph of the Southern Giant-Petrel, right down to a little black mottling.

Such a large source of food would not often be available and it must have attracted many seabirds from far and wide. The sea around the whale was white with the large rafts of Cape Petrels. I estimated that there were 300 but there were probably more. It is quite incredible to think that there were that many Cape Petrels wintering off our beaches. In addition there were at least 40-45 Southern Giant-Petrels feeding in a circle around the whale. These are both high numbers for Perth.

The Southern Giant-Petrels were feeding in the fresh bite marks that the tiger sharks had left behind in the blubber. You could actually see the sharks feeding only inches away from the Giant Petrels with the Cape Petrels milling around just behind them. One feeding Southern Giant-Petrel was standing on top of the whale and was probing its beak deep into the flesh. The exact location of this spectacle was 30 nautical miles off Ledge Point, south of Lancelin.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Channel Seven and their news director who kindly provided a tape of the news article.

M. Singor

CATTLE EGRET AT BROOME

On 14 May 1996, Janet Sparrow and I paid a visit to Broome sewage ponds at 1 pm. The weather was calm and sunny. While there, we observed a Cattle Egret (*Ardea ibis*) on one of the roads separating the ponds. The egret was close to but not amongst a group of six Australian White Ibis. The Cattle Egret was in full breeding plumage, showing a lot of rusty orange on the head and neck. Rusty orange plumes were apparent on its back when the bird shook itself, making the plumes stand up. The bill was very pale, appearing more horn coloured than yellow. The tarsi were black and the tibia grey green. We viewed the egret through binoculars and telescope from a distance of 50 m and then approached closer but it was very nervous and flew up before the ibis, despite being further from us than the ibis. The egret circled the ponds and landed. This time we managed to get within 30 m of the egret before a passing sea-eagle put up all the birds. We didn't see the egret again that day or on a subsequent visit we made two days later.

Using Collins, P. 1995, *The Birds of Broome — An Annotated List*. (published by Broome Bird Observatory) as a guide, this appears to be the first sighting of a Cattle Egret in the Broome area since May 1994.

Chris Hassell

Editors' note: Cattle Egrets are known to breed in the East Kimberley, but there are no records of breeding in the West Kimberley. As the bird seen by Chris Hassell and Janet Sparrow was in breeding plumage, it is possible that the species now breeds in the West Kimberley, or may do so in the near future.

DUCKS IN A SPIN

On 18 May 1996 at 3:30 pm a flock of 170 Pink-eared Ducks flew on to Herdsman Lake opposite Falcon Drive with a very loud 'whoosh'. Within ten minutes over half of the flock was roosting either on the shore or on the exposed areas within the lake, which was unusually shallow, showing wide expanses of sand both on the shore and also bordering the central reeds.

Many ducks not roosting were just floating along, but separated from these floaters there was a group of ten pairs of ducks revolving, with each pair separated by about one metre. These pairs were revolving like spokes of a wheel at 180° with their heads in the water touching in the centre. Nine of these pairs were revolving in an anti-clockwise direction but one pair was revolving in a clockwise direction. One lone duck was also revolving in an anti-clockwise direction firstly about

30 cm from one pair and then 30 cm from the next pair.

Because these revolving ducks were altogether in a separate group, the impression given was that they were acting as if in a country dance. Each pair kept revolving for about ten minutes then one by one the revolving ceased and they swam off together led by the first pair that had stopped revolving.

What was their purpose? Many birds in courtship offer food to their mate. Does this circular revolving movement stir up food which is directed towards the centre of the circle where two shovel-like bills await? Is this purely a mating ritual? What was the lone duck doing revolving 30 cm away firstly from one pair and then the next? Was it getting an easy feed or was it learning a mating ritual?

Mary Bremner

MORE ON 'NIP AND RETURN' FEEDING BY PARROTS

John Blyth's note (March 1996, WABN) on the feeding behaviour of black-cockatoos is very interesting. That behaviour is not confined to black-cockatoos, as I have observed the same behaviour with Red-capped Parrots feeding on Marri nuts. At least some of the green nuts, which are apparently too difficult for them to open up, are nipped off and dropped to the ground. After a week or two when they dry out and become softer the birds return to feed on them. I would imagine that this is a long established practice for this parrot as it occurs with a very common WA native tree.

Gordon Baker

MORE ON BLACK-COCKATOOS

Eating almonds

In WABN No. 77 (p.6), Mary Bremner reported Short-tailed Black-Cockatoos eating almonds from a tree in November 1995, and commented that in other years, it had always been the Australian Ringnecks that try to crack the almonds. We have also received a letter from Mrs V. Thompson, saying that she noticed Black-Cockatoos feeding on almonds in October in Balga. She further noted that usually it is the Australian Ringnecks that do this, and this year was the first in 20 that she had seen the cockatoos feeding on almonds.

Perhaps the Black-Cockatoos are changing their feeding behaviour - have any other members noted similar behaviour?

Eating pine nuts

Also in WABN No. 77 (pp. 6-7), it was reported that Mr John Collins had noted that, on Royal Perth Golf Course, Black-Cockatoos feed on pine cones at first on the tree, and then come back a couple of weeks later to feed on seeds on the ground, once these have been released from cones dropped on the first visit. Since then, Shapelle McNee has reminded us that such behaviour has been reported before. In 1948, D.H. Perry noted similar behaviour in several pine plantations around Perth. The fact that the cockatoos dropped so many cones meant that the Forests Department officers could collect pine seed from dropped cones rather than having to climb the trees themselves.

Allan Burbidge

Reference:

Perry, D.H. (1948) Black cockatoos and pine plantations. *Western Australian Naturalist* 1, 133-135.

A VIEW FROM MY OFFICE WINDOW

On many occasions in June 1996, I observed a few species feeding on the footpath outside my office at the Argyle Diamond mine in the Kimberley. The footpath is underneath some tallish (about 6 metre) acacia trees (I don't know the exact species).

On close inspection, I saw that the birds were feeding on a yellowish pollen-like substance on the ground. I then checked the acacia leaves, and on the back of almost every leaf were very small (about 1 mm) insects, or very small brown lumps in the leaf, or small yellow crystals. I believe that the brown lumps and yellow crystals are lerps although previously I had only read about lerps on eucalypts (especially in the east where there are Bell Miners). Lerps are sugary/waxy structures formed by tiny leaf-sucking insects.

Apart from being the first time that I had found lerps, my interest was drawn by the birds feeding on the footpath. At various times during the day (not so much in the morning), there were Yellow-throated Miners (up to ten although the last two were chased off by the others), Black-faced Woodswallows (up to ten), Grey-fronted Honeyeaters (at least two) and Rufous-throated Honeyeaters (at least ten). They nearly always tended to be in groups of a single species as the larger species would usually chase off the smaller. No species was 'resident' so they all got a turn.



The Mistletoe bird was conspicuous in June, both during the Dongara campout (see Excursions) and at the Argyle Diamond Mine. Drawn: Pam Free

Every species only fed on the footpath (as well as the foliage) rather than in the garden next to the path. I guess that the lerps are harder to find in the garden or that the bird would pick up too much soil, etc. Every species fed by putting their head on the side and picking up the food with the side of their

bill rather than with the point of their tongue.

The Yellow-throated Miners and Grey-fronted Honeyeaters are regular daily visitors outside my office every day of the year. The Black-faced Woodswallows are always present close by, but they don't often come outside my office (especially as many as ten). The Rufous-throated Honeyeaters are common in the area (and in the Argyle village) but they are uncommon outside my office except for one or two months of the year.

Brown Honeyeaters are usually also very common, but I have only seen one or two outside my office recently and none feeding on the ground. Magpie-larks are very common near my office and often feed on the footpath but not recently. I have seen a White-winged Triller a couple of times feeding in the acacias but not on the ground, although I have seen as many as nine outside my office. They are very common in the area and they frequently forage on the ground. There are currently two or three Mistletoebirds almost resident outside my office in the acacias. They mostly feed in the mistletoe that has grown in the last two years, but I have observed them foraging through the rest of the acacia, probably feeding on the lerps. In the past, I have seen Red-browed Pardalotes in the acacias outside my office, and I have been told that pardalotes (particularly Striated which also occur at Argyle) are very partial to lerps. They probably eat both the lerp and the associated insects.

The acacias also have cocoons, about 5 cm long, attached to the foliage at some times of the year (including a few now). These appear to be covered with the bark from the tree. These cocoons, or their contents, are very popular with the Little Corellas that are common in the area.

Frank O'Connor

CRESTED PIGEONS IN THE SOUTHWEST

On the morning of 4 June 1996 at about 7.30 am I observed a Crested Pigeon feeding on the roadside a few kilometres west of Pinjarra along the Pinjarra—Mandurah Road. As I have never previously seen this species in the district, it would be of interest to know of other records of it in this area. Does it represent an expansion of the pigeon's range further into the southwest part of the State?

Gordon Baker

DO DOGS DISTURB WATERBIRDS?

Many RAOU members have experienced problems when birdwatching due to uncontrolled dogs disturbing and often directly chasing birds. Some members have even reported dog-owners encouraging their dogs to chase birds, the owners justifying their actions by explaining that their dogs 'need the exercise'. Most of these reports were from urban areas such as Bibra Lake, Alfred Cove, Milyu, Herdsman Lake and Lake Monger, all locations, to the best of my knowledge, where dogs are permitted only on leads. Several members have reported waterbirds, especially Black Swans defending cygnets, being killed by dogs.

With the exception of the reports of birds being killed by dogs, the information provided by RAOU members sheds little light on the impact of dogs upon birds. However, it does indicate that roaming dogs, even when accompanied by their owners, are disturbing at least one group of other users of parks and reserves around Perth. Members also feel that, on ethical grounds, dogs should not be given the opportunity to

disturb birds, which are legally protected fauna.

There is, however, little evidence that occasional disturbance by dogs has any long-term adverse effects upon the birds. This is a difficult area to research because of the problems of separating disturbance from one source (in this case, dogs) from disturbance due to other sources (people walking, running or cycling, motor vehicles, aircraft, birds of prey, *etc.*). It is also difficult to separate population effects due to disturbance from effects due to other factors (hunting, pollution, loss of habitat, *etc.*). There is also the problem of defining impacts, which can include a decline in numbers, loss of weight, inability to moult and failure to breed. In retrospect, it is little wonder that it is difficult to state categorically whether or not roaming dogs have any long term effects on the birds they disturb.

Despite this, there are suggestions, some anecdotal and some published, that disturbance is a problem for birds, especially waterbirds, and that dogs are at least part of this problem. Waterbirds are especially vulnerable because their wetland homes are attractive to people, they roost on the shore and often feed on the shore and shallows, and the extent of human development often means that they have no option but to forage and roost in wetlands frequented by people and their pets. Many species are also migratory and can be vulnerable to disturbance when in a weakened state after completing a lengthy flight, or when attempting to lay down fat deposits before undertaking a lengthy flight.

A number of European studies indicate that disturbance from a variety of sources, including dogs, leads to changes in the behaviour of waterbirds, to a decline in feeding and increase in energy expenditure, and to a decline in breeding success. For example, Liddle and Scorgie (1980) recorded the displacement of large flocks of waterbirds and a reduction in breeding success in the Great Crested Grebe as a result of disturbance from water-based recreational activities.

Davidson and Rothwell (1993) edited a review of the subject of disturbance and waterbirds, and a number of the individual articles specifically mention dogs. Kirby *et al.* (1993) noted dogs as a highly significant source of disturbance on the Dee Estuary (near Liverpool). While less numerous than pedestrians, dogs resulted in more actual disturbance events. Different species of birds varied in their sensitivity to disturbance and the most sensitive species declined in numbers on weekends, when the frequency of disturbance was greatest. What impact this disturbance had on the birds was not recorded, although the numbers of birds actually increased over the five years of the study. This was attributed to "a successful program of intervention and education by voluntary wardens". The proportion of disturbance events due to dogs declined from 70% in 1986/87 to 25% in 1990/91, while the proportion due to pedestrians remained around 25% throughout this period. There was an increase in the number of people and dogs as potential sources of disturbance over the five years, but the number of actual disturbance events varied little except in the last year, when birds of prey were active in the area. Despite this complicating factor, the study suggested that controlling disturbance through intervention and education, especially disturbance due to dogs, allowed birds to increase in abundance at a site despite increasing usage of the site by people and dogs.

Owen (1993) examined disturbance due to hunting and other sources, and suggested that waterbirds can compensate

for lost time in feeding during the day by feeding at night. Lost feeding time has the potential to cause weight loss, to increase mortality and to increase the length of time required for moulting (many waterbirds have reduced powers of flight or are flightless when moulting), but such impacts have proven very difficult to demonstrate. In this study, dogs were found to cause an average disturbance time of 1.8 minutes, compared with only 1.2 minutes for pedestrians and 29.1 minutes for hunters. Unfortunately, it was not recorded if dogs were on or off leads or if hunters were using dogs to retrieve their catch.

Smit and Visser (1993) looked at the impact of disturbance on foraging by waders from an energetic viewpoint; that is, are the birds feeding less but expending more energy due to disturbance and, therefore, potentially stressing their energy budget, which can lead to weight loss and mortality. Belanger and Bedard (1990) conducted a similar study on migrating Snow Geese. Both studies concluded that disturbance has energetic implications despite the ability of birds to compensate to some degree by increasing their feeding rate and by feeding at night.

Several studies have demonstrated that some species, through their biology, are particularly sensitive to disturbance. Pienkowski (1993) reviews the decline in breeding success in a number of waterbirds due to disturbance, including the presence of dogs. Breeding success in the Hooded Plover, Fairy Tern and Little Tern in Australia has been found to decline as a result of disturbance (Schulz and Bamford 1987, Hill *et al.* 1988). Again, dogs have been implicated and solutions include fencing breeding areas to exclude sources of disturbance.

Similarly, Bamford *et al.* (1988) found that by confining a source of disturbance and allowing waterbirds refuge areas, impacts of disturbance were minimised.

Numbers of waders on the Swan River, especially at Alfred Cove, Milyu and Pelican Point, have been recorded regularly since the early 1980s and have declined from many thousands to a few hundred (Western Australian Wader Study Group, unpublished data). This has been attributed to birds being disturbed when foraging (especially by dogs at Alfred Cove) and when roosting at Milyu and Pelican Point (by pedestrians, dogs and prawners). Because of the frequency of disturbance, it is believed that the birds are not able to forage adequately and are expending excessive energy when flushed from roosting sites, resulting in the birds attempting to migrate when in poor condition. The Wader Study Group has requested local authorities and the Department of Conservation and Land Management to take steps to control this disturbance, including reducing access to specific beaches at Milyu by people and dogs.

The above, brief review indicates the complexity of the issue concerning impacts of disturbance on waterbirds. A few conclusions can be reached, however. Dogs do cause disturbance and birds react to dogs to a greater degree than they do to people. This is not unexpected, as dogs are probably perceived by the birds as a large predator, whereas people may be perceived as harmless or even as a benefactor. The previous experience of birds with sources of disturbance may be a factor in this. In other parts of the world, increasing pressure from humans (with their associated companion animals) on wetland areas has increased the potential for disturbance, but the disturbance can be controlled through education. The work by Kirby *et al.* (1993) suggests that controlling disturbance by dogs is most effective in reducing

overall disturbance. Impacts of disturbance such as the movement of waterbirds to refuge sites are well-documented, but long-term, population-level effects are very hard to demonstrate. There are reports, however, of declines in breeding success, and of foraging by birds being modified and of food intake being reduced due to disturbance, and these would be expected to have long-term impacts. In a few cases, such as Hooded Plovers and Little Terns, population decline due to a decline in breeding success, a direct result of disturbance, has been demonstrated. More commonly, population declines due to disturbance have only been recorded anecdotally, including the observations on waders on the Swan River. Removal of disturbance, if followed by a gradual increase in population, would be better evidence for disturbance having long-term impacts.

None of the studies cited above mentions if dogs were on or off leads, but observations at Alfred Cove in particular indicate that dogs off leads have a greater impact than dogs on leads, because they are able to approach the birds more closely, at a higher speed, and will chase them. The RAOU (WA Group) considers it highly appropriate that dogs be restrained on leads in all areas where sensitive wildlife occurs, and believes that the weight of evidence indicates that waterbirds are sensitive to disturbance by dogs.

Michael Bamford

Editors' note: The above article is an adaptation of a response by Mike Bamford on behalf of the WA Group to a letter from the City of South Perth. The City Council are proposing a new by-law to require dogs in Sir James Mitchell Park to be on a lead.

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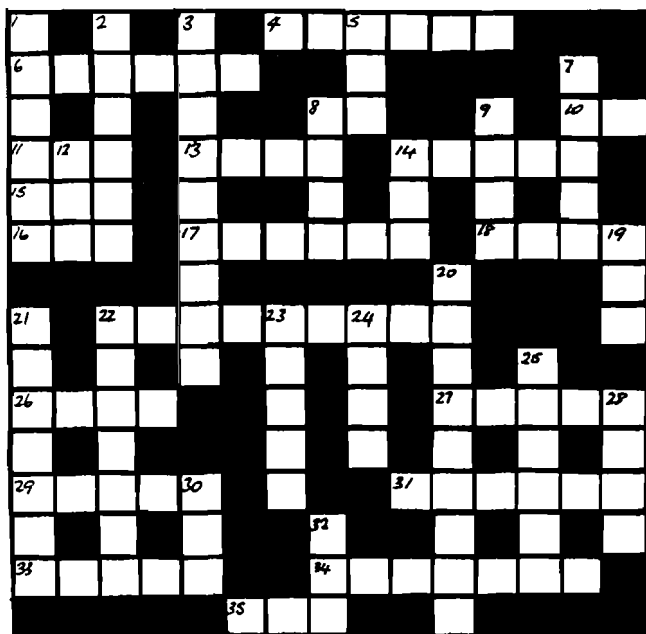
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CROSSWORD



Clues Across

4. Shape of a Fairy Martin's nest.
6. ... species may displace local birds.
8. The initials of a rare nocturnal bird.
10. The first two letters of the name of an endemic Australian wader.
11. Wrens' nests are usually ... in bushes.
13. Pale birds often have this scientific species name.
14. Some birds do this twice a year.
15. The number of eggs laid by a Noisy Scrub-bird.
16. Honeyeaters have been known to collect a ready-wrapped meal from one.
17. It's a good idea to work with one when birdwatching.
18. To take part in a twitchathon, you need to be a member of one.
22. A Raven is a useful one.
26. Vegetation does this, creating warmth to incubate eggs for megapodes.
27. Conical nest constructed by Malleefowl.
29. This brightly-coloured bird has become common in the wheatbelt.
31. Tall, graceful bird of northern Australia.

33. Favoured haunt of a particular harrier, one would think.
34. The delicate colouring of one particular tern.
35. Low breeding place of some seabirds.

Clues Down

1. The rump colour of one of the thornbills.
2. Fine thread used by Willie Wagtails for nest-building.
3. Feeding area for herons and other waders (2 words).
5. Usual number of eggs laid by Rock-Pigeons.
7. Brightly-coloured ground-dweller of tropical areas.
8. In a young bird, this is often distinctly coloured.
9. Most birds bathe in water, but some prefer this.
12. The number of young usually reared by a Wedge-tailed Eagle.
14. Needed by swallows at breeding time.
19. It may help to relocate a nest site more easily.
20. The longest and strongest of the wing feathers.
21. Searches for food.
22. This bird tends to work down the trunk or branches in search of food.
23. One of the raptors.
24. The only currawong found in WA.
25. May be a meal for an Osprey.
28. Compared to her mate, a hen in breeding plumage may be ...
30. Some birds do this rather than walk.
32. A curlew's call.

Solution on page 24.

Country Groups

ALBANY

Outings are held on the second Tuesday of the month and new members are welcome and encouraged to join the RAOU.

The February expedition to Morley Beach and the Hay River mouth saw many waders, including 230 Red-necked Avocets feeding with 13 Banded Stilts and 500 Black Swans. In all, 52 species were recorded.

The March outing took 25 of us to Waychinicup National Park, where we all heard several Noisy Scrub-birds. Some of us also heard Western Bristlebirds and Western Whipbirds. We recorded 40 species that day, mainly around the camping area.

In April only 13 of us met, but had a very successful viewing, walking along the embankment between the drain and Torbay Inlet. We recorded 60 species, including a large number of waterbirds, including 500 Black Swans, 120 Hoary-headed Grebes and 200 Red-necked Avocets.

Recently we had a successful indoor meeting with an attendance of 18 members to view the videos, *The Secret Reeds* and *Australian Nomads*.

We have about 25 regular attendees and are lucky to have some very knowledgeable bird enthusiasts, including Charlie and Liz Davies, Lola Broadhurst and Ray Garstone. Between them they have a wealth of knowledge.

Charlie and Liz were fortunate enough to see some Fork-tailed Swifts at Goode Beach earlier in the year.

It is hoped that within the next two months we can organise a campout to the Stirlings, staying in a shearing shed on an

adjacent property. This has yet to be finalised.

For any enquiries, contact:

Vivian McCormick, Albany Bird Group, PO Box 5116,
Albany WA 6330, telephone 098 44 1073;

or

Charlie Davies 098 44 7540.

Notices

MEGAPODES: SERIOUS ADVENTURES FOR SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL MEGAPODE SYMPOSIUM

THE LITTLE DESERT LODGE
NHILL, VICTORIA
6-9 DECEMBER 1997

**Come and share the excitement
and adventure of
MEGAPODE RESEARCH**

Following successful symposia held in conjunction with the International Ornithological Congresses of 1990 (Christchurch) and 1994 (Vienna), the third IMS is designed to bring together the world's foremost authorities on this unique family of birds to discuss the latest developments and issues in their conservation, taxonomy and relationships, interactions with humans, ecophysiology, evolution and adaptations and natural history.

This time, we are keen to emphasise the personal experiences and adventures of those involved in studying these birds in some of the most exciting and remote regions of the world. Experts from the United States of America, Europe, Indonesia, Oceania and Australia have been invited to participate. The speakers will include academics and professional ornithologists as well as field ecologists, wildlife managers and naturalists.

A four-day event is planned that will include a wide variety of presentations, field trips, entertainment and free time to enjoy the mallee environment. The location has been selected because, as well as providing a relaxing and beautiful setting in the authentic outback of Australia, it is also the home of one of the most unusual megapodes, the Malleefowl. Free-ranging yet relatively tame Malleefowl and their enormous incubation mounds are a key feature of the Little Desert Lodge.

Location: Little Desert Lodge, Nhill, Victoria, Australia. All attendees will be accommodated in the Lodge or in the nearby town of Nhill.

**THIS WILL BE A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE:
INFORMAL BUT EXCITING, RELAXED YET
INFORMATIVE. JOIN US FOR THIS SPECIAL EVENT.**

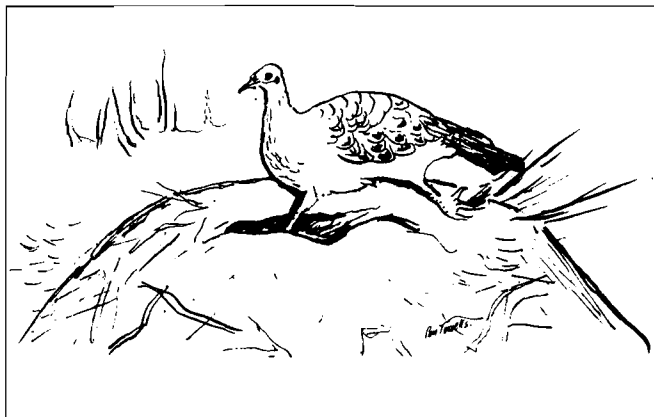
To express your interest in attending the Third Megapode Symposium, please write to the following address by 1 October 1996:

Dr Darryl Jones

Megapode Specialist Group

Faculty of Environmental Sciences

Griffith University, Nathan, Qld 4111



A Malleefowl at its mound.
Drawn: Penny Towells.

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

If you have any records of sightings of Gouldian Finches, either historical or recent, the Gouldian Finch Recovery Team is very keen to hear about them. Historical records are sparse, but are useful in documenting population decline and identifying sites for further searches. Recent records are also important, to assist in monitoring the present status of the Gouldian Finch. Any information on numbers seen, or behaviour, particularly feeding or breeding, would be invaluable.

We would also like to hear from anyone interested in carrying out counts at waterholes in parts of the Kimberley and Top End.

Please contact Peter Dostine on tel. (089) 221 753 or Allan Burbidge on (09) 405 5100 (W) or (09) 306 1642 (e-mail austecol@cygnus.uwa.edu.au).

Allan Burbidge and Peter Dostine

NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined the RAOU (WA Group) between 1 May 1996 and 31 July 1996. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

M Cashman-Bailes, W Clements, C Dillon, W Finkle, S Heinrich, C & C Horgan, P Joy, L Knight, G Lang, V Martin, J Nielsen, S Smoker, R G & R G Waterman.

PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

The following reports/journals/books have been received May 1996—June 1996:

Newsletter, Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc. Vol 17 No 5, March/April 1996.

Heinzel, H., Fitter, R. and Parslow, J. 1972. *The Birds of Britain and Europe*. William Collins, London (donated by Barbara Dudding).

The Stilt. Australasian Wader Study Group. Bulletin of the East—Asian/Australasian Flyway. No 28, April 1996.

The Tattler. Newsletter of Australasian Wader Study Group. No 7, April 1996.

Helen Clark, Hon Librarian

BIRDS AUSTRALIA

A question at a recent quiz night in Perth was "What do the letters 'RAOU' stand for?" There were several answers from the teams that came close to the correct interpretation — problems mainly occurred with the 'A' standing for "Australian" or the 'O' standing for "ornitho-something" and eventually there was no correct answer. When the name *Birds Australia*, which is to be formally launched at the Albany Congress in October, comes into common usage, our group will be easier to identify, even at a quiz night.

Roger Watson

Observatory Reports

Broome Bird Observatory

After our successful counts by hovercraft at bush point during March and April, we were persuaded that it would be a good idea to count the shorebirds there in June as part of our National Shorebird Count for winter. In order to maximise the count we needed a huge tide to concentrate the birds together and make it easier for us. During our banding course in June the tide reached 8.9 metres just perfect. The leader of the course, Perry de Rebeira, was enthusiastic towards the project and 21 200 birds later, thirteen people were exhausted with counting the huge wheeling flocks of shorebirds. We thank all the course participants and locals involved for a most enjoyable and productive day.

The banding course proceeded smoothly, with many trips to different sites; mangroves, bushland and private gardens. As usual there was much discussion of ageing and sexing techniques, along with the history of bird banding in Australia. Apart from mistnetting bushbirds, we also cannon netted waders and with the help of Irene Tarnay's excellent 'twinkle' (her efforts in finding birds for us) we caught a perfect sample of Grey-tailed Tattlers. Most of them were juveniles, spending their first year in Roebuck Bay before the rigorous migration for breeding began.

BBO is to have a laboratory! Thanks are due to the Gordon Reid Foundation, the efforts of our Management Committee and Grant Pearson from the Department of Conservation and Land Management. There has only been one significant study on the mudflats of Roebuck Bay in 1991 and interest was renewed when Theunis Piersma and Petra de Goej visited on the recent expedition. Since then BBO people have been slithering and sliding out on the mudflats every month collecting core samples of grey mud and painstakingly sorting these samples and removing the benthic fauna. These samples are then sent to the Netherlands for identification and other studies. The new laboratory will have immediate benefits for anyone contemplating research at BBO. Building will commence in September or October this year.

Visitors to the Observatory and the Friends of Broome have donated another much needed Kowa telescope to the Observatory. This was especially useful during our last course

Birding in the Warm Winter Sun, on our day visit to Roebuck Plains Station. We visited three wetlands, where there were many waterbirds; Brolga, Glossy Ibis, Red-kneed Dotterel and Pink-eared Duck were the highlights for us. We were accompanied by four expert ex-wardens, the Double Gs, Gwen and Graham Goodreid, and Rita and George Watkins. Having all worked at Eyre Bird Observatory, and the Goodreids also at Rotamah Observatory, their knowledge and friendship was much appreciated. Spotted Harriers were in abundance on the plains along with huge numbers of Nankeen Kestrels.

John Fallaw and Becky Hayward

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY.

Spring is already upon us, and believe it or not Phillip and I have been Wardens at Eyre for nearly one year now! The time has flown by in a bevy of people and birds.

In May we attended an Honorary CALM Officer training course near Kalgoorlie which was most informative. We will now be able to conduct minor policing duties within Nuytsland Nature Reserve if necessary.

Two more unusual bird species recorded lately include Regent Parrot and Pallid Cuckoo. Southern Right Whales have also been spotted at Twilight Cove, near Eyre — they truly are a magnificent sight. Meanwhile, our local birds continue to delight. Welcome Swallows have begun refurbishing nests, a group of five Wedge-tailed Eagles have taken up residence on a nearby ridge and a pair of Southern Scrub-robins continue to wake us each morning with their cheery tunes.

New Holland, Singing, Brown, White-fronted and White-eared Honeyeaters have been recorded in large numbers and Purple-gaped Honeyeaters are seen quite regularly too.

Don't forget our courses that will be conducted soon — Bird Banding, Malleefowl Studies, Focus On Birds in October and a special 'Christmas At Eyre' over the December holiday.

Joye Wilson & Phillip Sharples

Excursion Reports

WHITEMAN PARK, 23 March

Sixteen members, including several who had recently joined the RAOU, joined Michael Brooker in Whiteman Park on an overcast morning. The section in which we walked is not generally open to the public and Michael led us through areas of Banksia woodland, Marri and heathland. Our first treat was a sighting of several Elegant Parrots which are not usually seen so close to the metropolitan area. Another good sighting was of a flock of 100 plus Short-billed Black-Cockatoos flying low over us. Michael was able to show us a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest which was built recently and later we were provided with a spectacular display — perhaps from the nest's builder — of 'pot-hooking', that is, soaring high and then diving, with folded wings, straight down, presumably pulling up before hitting the ground!

Altogether 33 species were seen during the morning's walk and our thanks go to Michael for this enjoyable outing.

Margery Clegg

NORTH LAKE, 27 March

Nine people, including one new member and two non-members, met at 8.30 am to walk around the lake on a cold, damp, windy morning. Just before we arrived several brief rain storms had passed over, helped by a strong, cold wind. Although the water level of the lake had receded there was still sufficient water to attract 26 species of waterbirds. Ducks, grebes, ibis and herons, *etc.* were present, plus five species of waders, of which the Bar-tailed Godwit was the most unusual, and including 50 Red-necked Avocets.

The surrounding bush yielded a further 25 species of birds of which a sub-adult Fan-tailed Cuckoo was the most interesting. This bird gave the group ample opportunity to view its plumage as it foraged for caterpillars in front of where we were standing. During the time of approximately two hours which we took to walk round the lake, a total of 51 species was seen.

Bryan Barrett

LAKE GWELUP, 4 April

Eight people, including two visitors from Canada, attended this Thursday morning walk. The weather was fine, with not much wind. There was plenty of water in the lake, despite the hot, dry summer we had just experienced. Numbers of waterfowl were present, including seven species of duck. An interesting sighting was of two Red-necked Avocets. These were the first waders I had recorded here in the past three visits. Generally speaking, the shores of this lake are too heavily reeded to be good wader country. However, Hank van Wees informs me that some reed-clearing has been done at the North Beach Road side which may attract different species to the area.

After a walk through Karrinyup Reserve to look for bushbirds, we returned to the car park to compile our birdlist. At this point I must offer an apology to the members of the group. I announced the count as 46 when, in fact, we had identified 52 species. Altogether, a pleasant morning walk in a solidly reliable birding area.

Eric Banfield

FLYNN ROAD, 5 May

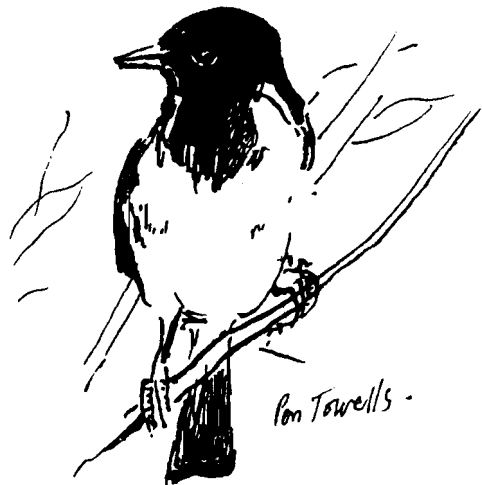
As the Avon Valley National Park had still not recovered from the serious bushfire in 1995, the scheduled walk in the Park was transferred to Flynn Road. In spite of this last minute change, a group of 18 members, some of whom had only recently joined the RAOU, met in this interesting area of the Darling Range. One of the first calls heard was from a pair of Restless Flycatchers who were very vocal — perhaps this was a sign of early breeding?

The first two areas visited were in stands of tall wandoo near where the creek was flowing well after recent rain. Scarlet and Western Yellow Robins were seen by most of the group, and at the lunchtime spot a pair of Hooded Robins was very accommodating in that they stayed around the area in spite of our intrusion.

After lunch some of the group continued on to a small area of heathland where some of the shrubs were in flower. Here several species of honeyeater were much in evidence and a nest containing very young birds was seen in a low bush on the edge of the road — it was not possible to decide whether they were New Holland or White-cheeked Honeyeaters as the nests look exactly the same. Also in the area a Peregrine Falcon

was seen in the distance perched on a tall tree in a nearby paddock. A total of 40 species was seen during the walk which was a satisfying total considering the day had started as being quite chilly with a lot of cloud.

Bryan Barrett



The Hooded Robin, drawn here by Penny Towells, is one of the feature birds of Flynn Road

YALGORUP NATIONAL PARK, 26 May

It was cloudy weather for the 33 people who met on White Hill road, on what turned out to be a perfect day for a 12 km birding walk. We set off from the northern end of the national park with our southern-most destination being Swan Pond.

Permission was obtained from the owners of private property that allows northern access to Lake Clifton. On this property is an old house built in 1865 by James Heron, a policeman stationed at Guildford. The property, of 3000 acres, was left as scrub with two paddocks being cleared around the homestead for wheat cultivation. The harvested wheat was ground in Bunbury for the consumption of the household.

There were few bird sightings until we approached the old homestead when the day's first significant feeding groups appeared: Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Silvereyes, Weebill, Rufous Whistler, Splendid Fairy-wren, Inland Thornbill and Scarlet Robins.

At Lake Clifton the group was both surprised and delighted to see waders including approximately 100 Red-necked Avocets, approximately 50 Black-winged Stilts, Red-necked Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Red-capped Plovers and half a dozen Fairy Terns.

After a kilometre walk along Lake Clifton's edge, Swan Pond was a welcome site, but not a swan to be seen! More waders were on Swan Pond with the addition of Grey Plover.

Lunch was enjoyed adjacent to Swan Pond in a delightful area of old Peppermint trees with scattered fallen logs we used for seats. Sue boiled the billy which gave us all a hot cuppa with our lunch.

The day ended with a total of 49 species sighted.

After an easy 12 km walk, 18 people took up Sue's offer to view the thrombolites (a type of stromatolite) located on

the eastern side of Lake Clifton. It is here that CALM has recently constructed a boardwalk which allows excellent views of these unique formations.

Another great day courtesy of Sue Abbotts.

Dee Smith

HERDSMAN LAKE, 8 June

The day was cool but sunny, ideal for a walk of about ten kilometres to circumnavigate the lake. Twenty five people started off at the north eastern corner of the lake, and most had reasonable views of a Spotless Crake near our starting point.

With a total of 68 species seen for the day there were a number of highlights. One of them was the diversity and abundance of birds of prey, nine in all (if we include the Boobook Owl hiding in a dense Melaleuca shrub). Excellent views were had of several Little Eagles, both light and dark colour phases, interacting with each other and with several Black-shouldered Kites. Although not an uncommon bird, the Brown Falcon was perhaps the most interesting of the raptors because we have not seen them at Herdsman Lake before.

Other interesting sightings were a Little Egret, not commonly seen here, Buff-banded Rail, and Chestnut-breasted Mannikins. It was also good to see Striated Pardalotes, which we hope have finally joined the small number of leaf gleaning birds which have recolonised the northern fringes of the lake since the establishment of forests of Flooded Gums and Melaleucas. Surprisingly, the Weebills seem not to have yet made the small jump across from Bold Park to take advantage of this new resource.

A fairly full suite of waterbirds was also seen, with the three species of grebes, eleven ducks and three ibis. Altogether a satisfying, if slightly tiring, day's birdwatching.

John Blyth

DONGARA EXCURSION, 31 May to 3 June

On 31 May, 18 members gathered at the Seaspray Caravan Park for a long weekend excursion. After breakfast on Saturday we met at the lookout overlooking the mouth of the Irwin River from where we could see a large number of water birds and a pair of ospreys. We then moved up river to the east side of the town bridge and walked along the river course under the River Red Gums and saw a great variety of bush birds, the most vocal and visible being the Mistletoebird. A pair of Fan-tailed Cuckoos proved rather elusive but was eventually located.

In the afternoon we were joined by Joyce and John White, now resident in Dongara, and Kath Haythornthwaite from Geraldton who led us to the Yardanogo Nature Reserve, south of Dongara. It was an interesting area of heath, Banksia and eucalyptus (*Illyarie*) woodland with few birds and rather too many midges. A pair of Brown Falcons perched for a short time close to the group.

On Sunday morning we set off early along the Mingenew Road. We left the bitumen at Strawberry to reach the Burma Road, stopping at intervals to survey the birds in the reserve of low heath country and Banksia. White-winged Fairy-wrens, Rufous Fieldwren (*Calamanthus*), White-fronted Chats, Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters and Red-capped Robins, with various other honeyeaters and thornbills, kept us busy.

Ellendale Pool was our lunch stop. There we were greeted by a very large flock of Little Corellas, but the pair of Peregrine Falcons on the cliff face was of the greatest interest. This was

a beautiful birding area for both water and bush birds and included Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, Red-capped Robins and Variegated Fairy-wrens.

On Monday morning it was found that the Irwin River had broken through the sandbar to the ocean. Some of the party did a beach walk and some visited the Dongara sewage pond where a Spotted Harrier and White-backed Swallows had been seen the previous day.

Bird calls were held each evening when we all gathered at the barbecue area. Sue provided us with a splendid damper on Sunday evening. The species total for the weekend came to 86 — the bottle of wine being won by Margery Clegg. The excursion was very well planned and organised by Sue Abbotts and her helpers and was really enjoyed by us all. It was also a great opportunity to meet some of the local bird enthusiasts.

Barbara Hale, Roz Denny and Nora Brockman

PERTH ZOO, 23 June

A group of some 25 people gathered early outside the main entrance to Perth Zoo on an overcast morning. We were met by Neil Hamilton of the zoo staff and he ushered us into the grounds for a leisurely 'pre-crowds' stroll.

Neil showed us the recently refurbished aviaries, where the labels attached to the wire accurately listed the birds in the enclosure. I, for one, appreciated the improvement here, knowing that people should no longer go away associating a bird with the wrong name.

At about this point overcast had become showery and the pessimists who had arrived carrying umbrellas were vindicated.



A wet day at the Zoo
Photo: Brenda Newbey

Neil provided some interesting insights into the sorts of problems that are experienced in trying to maintain 'pure' strains and avoid hybridisation, even between recognised races in the case of some species.

The walk-in aviaries have always been impressive, and I think that there has even been improvement in these two areas recently. Both provide for clear and close viewing of birds that most Perth people are unlikely to see elsewhere.

Similarly, the new location of the Cassowary provides a far more realistic backdrop for this bird than did the old paddock on the hill where it was kept formerly.

The new waterbird enclosure, still under construction, should be a great addition to the zoo. Several native grasses and reeds are being planted and this extensive area will be kept off-limits to 'freeloaders', such as gulls and other opportunists, through the large net tent that will be raised over the expanse of water.

By this time the showers had become persistent, quite heavy rain, and all but the most hardy thanked Neil for an interesting and informative morning and headed for the car park.

What had been a surprise for some, however, was the extensive list of free-flying birds recorded at the zoo over the past few years. Even without the aviaries and pinioned birds on the water, the zoo gardens would provide an excellent location for birding close to the city centre.

Clive Nealon

WAMBYN RESERVE, 29 June

Take a mix of seasoned birdwatchers, some enthusiastic new members, a cheerful visitor from South Africa, and a couple of odd ex-wardens. Place them on a pretty little reserve at the edge of the Avon wheatbelt, and you have a recipe for an enjoyable and purposeful excursion.

Just 15 km west of York, the Wambyn Reserve is on the border of Jarrah forest and Wandoo woodland. There is, therefore, an interesting mix of bird species typical of both environments. Interesting questions arise about the population and distribution trends in the last decade. For example, Jim Masters observed of the Wambyn Reserve in 1985 that Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters were scarce then. The reserve had last been officially visited by the RAOU in 1991.

The 12 birdwatchers assembled at the front of the reserve in June 1996 set out to address these issues. Braving freshening nor'westerlies and waterlogged terrain, they scoured the eastern third in the morning, and discovered a happy mix of species, including seven species of honeyeaters, a Mistletoebird, Jacky Winter, Varied Sittella, Western Yellow Robin and a species of quail. Indicating at least one specific species trend, Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters were plentiful.

Wandering through attractive breakaway country encircled by sheoak, and paperbark abutting granite outcrops, it was clear that the various vegetation belts on the one reserve assisted this blend of species to occur together. Even on a fairly bleak winter Saturday, the birds were out and about in some profusion.

In the early afternoon, a leisurely stroll through open Wandoo with a varied heath understorey in the western third of the reserve yielded up White-browed Babblers and a Peregrine Falcon, bringing the day's total to 48.

There is a belt of attractive reserves like this circling the metropolitan area; they merit systematic surveillance, since it is apparent that some significant shifts are occurring in distributions and numbers. They also serve an important recreational purpose for groups such as the RAOU: they're fun to visit!

John Ashford

LAKE COOGEE, 6 July

In the midst of wet and windy days, Saturday presented as a brilliant sunny day. A group of 24 enthusiasts gathered for a most rewarding walk along the western edge of Lake Coogee. Fifty-five species were recorded during the morning walk, and a further two — a hobby and a Hoary-headed Grebe — were added when three of us optimistically returned to the location of a Goldfinch sighted earlier in the morning, making a total of 57 for the excursion.

The beautiful day was made for raptors, and excellent and extended views of Little Eagles (2) and Brown Goshawks (2) riding on the wind, were a highlight of the morning. The air was thick with Tree Martins and Welcome Swallows, whilst a group of five White-backed Swallows displayed for over an hour.

Both the Goldfinch and an Elegant Parrot were new sightings for our Lake Coogee record, which now stands at 98 species.

Jan and Dave Crossley

STAR SWAMP, 17 July

Unfortunately, the very blustery conditions made birding difficult. Birds were difficult to see and difficult to hear. So we only saw 26 species. The highlight was the sighting of an Australian Hobby harassing some Little Pied Cormorants which flew up from the swamp.

The birds were so scarce that the outing turned out to be a combined birding and botanical excursion. Phyllis Robertson was able to show and identify many interesting plants and trees.

Star Swamp is a 100-hectare reserve which combines the swamp itself with a rich diversity of plants. The Tuart and Marri trees made a delightful woodland setting and there are also good heathland areas. This reserve also had a significant role in the history and development of the Stirling area.

We searched the heathland for the White-winged Fairy-wren but were unsuccessful. The only bird recorded in the heathland was the White-cheeked Honeyeater.

The swamp yielded Pacific Black Duck, Dusky Moorhen, Purple Swamphen, Eurasian Coot, Australasian Grebe and Little Black and Little Pied Cormorants.

The reserve should be revisited in springtime when there should be many more birds and wildflowers.

Many thanks to our leader, Vera Patterson, who is a member of the group which saved Star Swamp Reserve. She has recorded nearly 70 species of birds in the reserve.

Tom Delaney

NORTH MOLE, FREMANTLE, 20 July

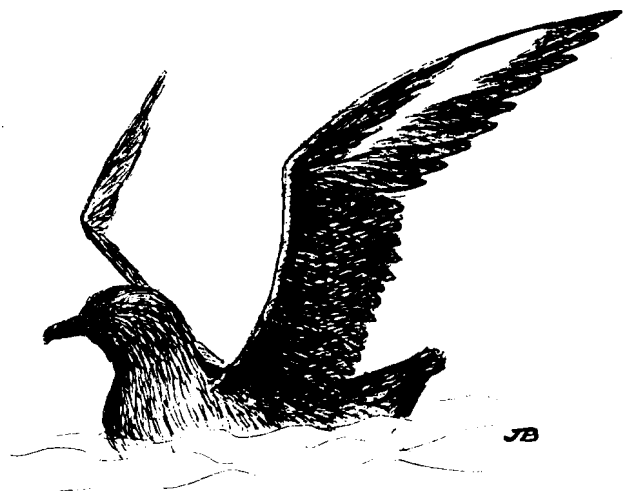
Despite grey skies and a cold north-westerly wind, 12 members turned up for a spot of seabird-watching at North Mole. Storm damage to the groyne meant leaving the cars at the entrance and taking a walk to the lighthouse at its end.

Other than good views through the telescopes of Australasian Gannets and distant ones of Great Skuas, the morning's three-hour session turned out to be typical of seabird-watching at the Mole (lots of effort and patience for usually little but occasionally spectacular rewards).

The harbour area was more productive and we listed Darters, Great, Pied, Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants,

Caspian and Crested Terns, Silver Gull, Welcome Swallow, Laughing Turtle-Dove and Australian Shelduck.

K C Lim



The Southern Skua is frequently seen at North Mole, Fremantle, in winter. Drawn: Judy Blyth

Snippets

NW '96 — AT THE COALFACE

The 1996 Expedition was the biggest and most successful one held so far by the Australasian Wader Studies Group. In all 81 people from 16 different countries took part over seven weeks. Three main locations were the focus of major trapping efforts — Roebuck Bay, Broome, Eighty-Mile Beach between Broome and Port Hedland and the Port Hedland Saltworks. Trapping was also carried out at other places such as the Port of Broome, Roebuck Plains, Bush Point and Port Hedland Racecourse.

The waders at both Roebuck Bay and Eighty-Mile Beach were prolific. At low tide hundreds of thousands of them spread as far as the eye could see in all directions. At high tide they were pushed into tight masses on the strand lines and were easy prey for the cannon-nets of Clive Minton. Clive's 40 years' experience in this form of trapping meant that he rarely placed the nets in unfavourable positions and he kept the entire team busy every day banding and measuring the waders caught in the nets.

Activities were interrupted by two major tropical cyclones, particularly Cyclone Kirstie which came perilously close to Broome in the second week. This was followed by a spectacular electrical storm which kept most people awake one night at Eighty-Mile Beach. One benefit of the cyclones was that at many places on Roebuck Plains and Anna Plains huge ephemeral wetlands developed from the rain and these

attracted vast numbers of waders including Australian and Oriental Pratincoles, Little Curlews, Black-winged Stilts and Oriental Plovers as well as a variety of terns.

Mike Crowley

Reprinted from *The Tattler*, No 7, April 1996

NW '96 — WARDEN'S VIEWPOINT

For the Broome Bird Observatory, the 1996 NW AWSG Expedition was a huge success. Being the biggest expedition to date, it was a great privilege to be host to 81 keen expeditioners from so many countries and backgrounds. Under Clive Minton's untiring leadership the group was always busy and it was great to see the many friendships which stemmed from the hard work and success of catching and banding the shorebirds.

Many of the overseas members gave fascinating talks about their studies. In the evening the shade house was packed to the gunwales, the heat and mozzies adding an element not present when some of the talks were given at the Ramsar or AWSG Conferences. Yasuo Ueki showed stunning slides of Painted Snipe, which he had studied all his life.

The Russians gave many talks on the Arctic tundra and Chu Guozhong, head of the Chinese Banding Scheme, talked about his new job. It was heartening to hear from Sawai Wanghonsa of the efforts being made in Thailand to rehabilitate old prawn farms, while David Melville illustrated the enormous pressures on the Mai Po marsh area of Hong Kong.

In contrast the relatively pristine environment of Roebuck Bay and Eighty-Mile Beach was the perfect forum to inspire efforts to study and protect shorebirds. We caught up with friends from previous expeditions like Minoru Kashiwagi, who came to Broome in 1994 having just retired from teaching, returning this year with three Japanese students, all keen to continue work to protect shorebird habitat in Japan. Allan Baker brought us up to speed on some of the ground-breaking work on the phylogeny of shorebirds since his last visit, along with the gruelling field work planned as follow-up to his expedition last year in South America.

In 1991 Petra de Goej and Ingrid Tulp, from the Netherlands, did the first study of the Roebuck Bay mudflats and the feeding habits of the Red Knot and Great Knot. Petra returned for the expedition with Theunis Piersma and along with Grant Pearson from CALM, have set the wheels in motion for continuing mudflat studies at Roebuck Bay. Many trips were made out on the flats. Tom Scotney nearly became a permanent fixture in Crab Creek on one occasion.

We thank all expeditioners for their contribution to BBO's daily log every night. Of particular importance were the two counts done at Bush Point, with significant counts of tern species (1200 Little Tern and 1750 Lesser Crested Tern) and Sanderling (800). While the team was waiting for Cyclone Kirstie to pass, at least four new bird species were added to our Broome list and our keeping cages received some much needed repairs. Migration watch at BBO was again possible with help and input from many people. Manning the beach for two hours every day for two months was our aim and we achieved this with much help from AWSG members and participants on *Wave the Waders Goodbye* course led by Danny Rogers. BBO now has four years of data on visible shorebird migration. Combined with weather data from the Met Bureau, we now have an extremely good picture of average flock size

and peak departure dates for many species.

We thank the AWSG for fully testing our new solar/diesel power system, which is now ready to be unleashed to the general public. Finally, thank you, Clive Minton, for his tireless efforts in organising the entire expedition and making it all possible.

Jon Fallaw and Becky Hayward
Broome Bird Observatory

AND THE RESULTS

Pied Oystercatcher	3
Sooty Oystercatcher	19
Grey Plover	47
Lesser Golden Plover	2
Red-kneed Dotterel	15
Lesser Sand Plover	2
Greater Sand Plover	912
Oriental Plover	2
Red-capped Plover	8
Black-fronted Plover	3
Black-winged Stilt	26
Red-necked Avocet	3
Ruddy Turnstone	104
Eastern Curlew	1
Whimbrel	41
Grey-tailed Tattler	443
Common Sandpiper	1
Greenshank	4
Terek Sandpiper	762
Asian Dowitcher	3
Black-tailed Godwit	7
Bar-tailed Godwit	1592
Red Knot	509
Great Knot	1582
Red-necked Stint	1354
Curlew Sandpiper	438
Sanderling	1
Broad-billed Sandpiper	138
Oriental Pratincole	1

29 Wader Species 8092

Whiskered Tern	1
Gull-billed Tern	19
Caspian Tern	1
Common Tern	122
Little Tern	62
Crested Tern	28
Lesser Crested Tern	124
Silver Gull	3

Gulls/Terns 360

Overseas recoveries. Four overseas recoveries were caught during the expedition. These included Terek Sandpiper from Korea, Curlew Sandpipers from Hong Kong and Taiwan and a Red-necked Stint from Japan.

Reprinted from *The Tattler*, No 7, April 1996.

HOODED PLOVER SURVEY 1996

A comprehensive survey of the Hooded Plover will be undertaken again this year. Hopefully the weather will be kinder to us this year and we will not have a repeat of the gales experienced in 1994. Each of the states within the range of the Hooded Plover will be involved in the survey again this year. Other species which will be included are Pied Oystercatcher, Red-capped Plover, Little and Fairy Terns, Pacific Gulls and White-bellied Sea-Eagles.

The NSW part of the survey will be extended to the Queensland border with a commitment by all major bird groups in the state to participate through the Bird Interest Group Network (BIGNET).

Anyone interested in taking part in this year's survey should contact their state coordinator or the National Coordinator, Mike Weston. **We need as many people as possible to help.**

Most areas in the south and west will be carried out over the weekend of 2/3 November while counts in NSW will be from 9 to 17 November, taking in two weekends.

NSW:

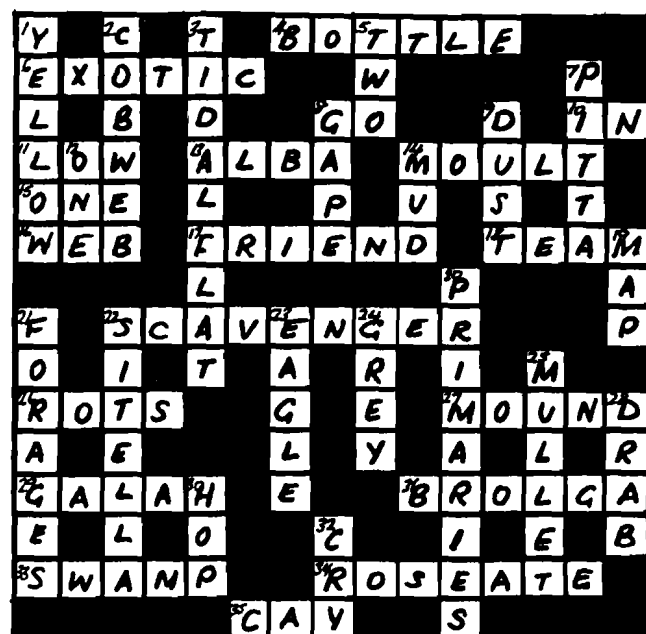
Phil Straw (02) 290 1810, fax (02) 290 1812

Victoria and the rest of Australia:

Mike Weston (03) 9882 2622, fax (03) 9882 2677

Reprinted from *The Tattler*, No 7, April 1996

Crossword Solution



Coming Events

Sunday 1 September — Half-day Walk at Bennett Brook

Meet at 8 am at the southern end of Valley Brook Road, off Benara Road, Caversham. Ninety-one species, including 19 breeding species, have been recorded here. We have a 46% chance of seeing a flock of 250 Little Corellas.

Leader: Ron Van Delft

Sunday 8 September — *Spring Fling*, Perry House/ Bold Park

The Wildflower Society is holding its annual wildflower display at Perry House on Sunday 8 September. This very popular and well attended event runs from 9 am to 4 pm. We participate by guiding bird walks around Bold Park, by mounting a display of local birds and setting up our stall for the sale of cards and books.

Our walks and stall have always been well patronised and we will need about a dozen volunteers to help during the day. If you can take part, please notify Peter Anson or leave your name at the office.

Sunday 15 September — Full-day Walk from Nanga Bridge along the Murray River

Meet at 8:30 am at the Dwellingup Hotel. From Perth, drive down the Southwest Highway to North Dandalup. Turn left to Dwellingup. Allow one hour of driving time from Armadale (about 70 km one-way).

This will be a 12 km undulating walk down a creek and along the Murray River. We'll follow a good track through Jarrah, Marri and Banksia, with some beautiful views of the river.

Bushbirds seen in this area include Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Red-eared Firetail, Red-winged Fairy-wren, White-breasted Robin, and Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Bring lunch and a minimum of 1 litre of water per person. I'll boil a billy for everyone at lunch time.

Leader: Sue Abbotts (444 1607)

Wednesday 18 September — Mid-week Walk at Canning River Regional Park, Wilson

Meet at 8:30 am at the Kent Street Weir car park, near the Canning River, to explore the varied bird life of the Canning wetlands.

Leader: Clive Napier

Sunday 22 September — Full-day Excursion at Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve

A bus with 22 seats will leave Perth Number 4 Car Park at 7:30 am, with a second stop at Woolworth's car park in Kelmscott at 7:50 am. Aim to return to Perth by 6 pm. The cost of a bus ticket is \$12 per person. Ring Clive Napier (332 7265) by 15 September to reserve a seat.

For those wishing to travel privately, either make your own way to Boyagin Rock or join a convoy, which will meet

at 8:15 am at the corner of Canning Mills Road and Brookton Highway, Karragullen. The round trip to the Rock is about 250 km. This reserve (Western Australian Traveller's Atlas map reference C4, map 55) contains impressive stands of Powderbark Wandoo and has a species list of about 73 birds. There are moderate to easy walks, with some more strenuous around the Rock.

Leaders: Bill McRoberts and Clive Napier

Monday 23 September Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Tens of thousands of Banded Stilts nested at Lake Ballard near Menzies following cyclonic rain early in 1995. Jim Lane of CALM will describe this memorable breeding event and what it has added to our knowledge of this unusual wader species.

Saturday 28 September – Monday 30 September — Birdwatching Campout at Dryandra State Forest

Two cottages have been reserved at Dryandra State Forest near Narrogin (2 1/2 hours ex Perth), at a cost of \$10 per person per night. Sorry, no camping.

Bring your own food and sleeping bag. Crockery, cutlery, and cooking utensils are provided. There are barbecues as well. Please phone Bryan Barrett on 457 2335 to book your place.

One hundred and six species of birds have been seen in the reserve, including Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens, Western Yellow Robins, Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, and Restless Flycatchers. Dryandra is a great place for night spotting, so bring a good torch and car spotlight if you have one.

Leaders: Bryan Barrett and Helen Clark (assisting)

Tuesday 1 October Special Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley 8:30 pm

The name of Dr Clive Minton is associated in Western Australia with the NW Australia wader expeditions which he has led for the last decade and which have been based in Broome. His talk, the final details of which remain to be settled, will concern an area considered to be one of the most important for waders in the world.

Saturday, October 5 — Full-day Bird Survey at Paruna Sanctuary, Gidgegannup

Meet at 9 am at the Sanctuary. From Perth, travel up Toodyay Road from Roe Highway, Midland, for about 11 km. Turn left into O'Brien Road at the "scenic drive" sign (to Walyunga Lookout). After about 14 km, O'Brien Road turns a sharp right and becomes Clenton Road (this is at the access point to Walyunga Lookout — look for the sign). 2.5 km down Clenton Road, on the left hand side, is Avon Road. Avon Road is a short (less than 1 km) gravel 'No Thru Road' and Paruna is located right at the end, where there is a large sign.

Paruna is a new sanctuary, owned by the same people who own Karakamia Sanctuary at Chidlow. A bird list of 35 species presently exists, but we'd like to improve on this. Paruna is floristically and structurally very diverse, with powderbark breakaways, wandoo woodland, heathland, Jarrah/Marri forest,

and granite outcrops. The area also offers magnificent views.

Don't forget to bring your lunch and some water.

Leader: Andre Schmitz (Sanctuary Manager)

**Saturday, October 12 — Sunday, October 13 —
Campout at Tutanning Nature Reserve, Pingelly**

Please phone the RAOU office for directions, as you will need a photocopied map/set of instructions sent out to you. Leave your name, telephone number, contact address, and number of people in your party. There will be a limit of 20 participants, as the camping area is small.

Leaders: Bryan Barrett and Leon Silvester

**Monday 14 October Special Meeting—Joan Watters
Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm**

Professor Gordon Maclean, the current editor of *Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa* (the leading textbook of the birds of the subcontinent for over 50 years) and the President of the Southern African Ornithological Society, will speak to us about the endemic birds of South Africa.

**Monday 14 October to Friday October 18 —
Malleefowl field study at Peniup Reserve**

This week long project is a continuation of the excellent work being done by the Ongerup Malleefowl Preservation Society to identify and monitor Malleefowl in large areas of remnant vegetation in their area. The RAOU WA Group has been closely involved in a coordinated national recovery effort for the Malleefowl for some time and has conducted a previous campout to survey part of the Peniup Reserve. If you can help the MPG make this week a success, contact Suzanne Dennings at 098 282 007.

**Thursday, October 17 — Mid-Week Walk at Wellard
Wetlands, Baldivis**

Meet at 8:30 am at the entrance to Wellard Wetlands on the northern side of Zigzag Road, 1 km from St. Alban's Road, Baldivis.

There should be plenty of waterbirds and bushbirds breeding.

Leader: Bryan Barrett.

**Sunday, October 20 — Full-day Excursion to Austin
Bay Nature Reserve, Eastern Peel Inlet**

Meet at 8:30 am at the end of Beacham Road (some older maps show this as Grey's Road). Beacham Road (signposted) is the second turnoff to the right after crossing the Murray River, travelling towards Pinjarra on the main Mandurah—Pinjarra Road. It's 12.7 km from Mandurah via the Perth—Bunbury Road, and 3.1 km east of the Murray River. The distance along Beacham Road (winding, but follow your nose) from the Pinjarra Road to the meeting point is about 7 km. Round trip from Perth is about 200 km.

The area provides a combination of estuarine waters and flats, coastal scrub, woodland, and freshwater wetlands; we should find a good range of birds.

This is Ross River virus country, so bring ample mosquito

repellent and long clothes. Gumboots will probably be needed as well.

Leaders: John and Judy Blyth

**Saturday, October 26 — Full-day Excursion to
Serpentine National Park**

Meet at 8:30 am at the junction of the South Western Highway and Falls Road (the turnoff to Serpentine Falls). A return visit by RAOU members to areas not frequented by the public; our last visit was two years ago. A species list of over 80 birds has been compiled. Bring lunch and drinks.

Leader: Peter Anson

Sunday 27 October — Bold Park Walks

The WA Group usually holds an open day at Perry House, and conducts public walks in Bold Park, on this weekend to celebrate National Bird Week. We need helpers, either to show people around and provide cups of tea and coffee at Perry House or to lead or help on bird walks. These days are a significant way that we increase our membership, so please contact Judy Blyth on 381 6293 if you can help.

**Saturday, Sunday 2 & 3 November—Malleefowl and
mounds at Nugadong Reserve, Dalwallinu**

An extension of the work done in August this year will be carried out on the first weekend of November. About 30 mounds, including 13 active ones, were counted on the two-day trip in August! This is an attractive area of bushland which promises some interesting bird species, including Malleefowl of course. You will need a compass (or be with friend who carries one) and a whistle.

Farm accommodation is available about half an hour's drive from the reserve.

Contact Rod Smith (397 5319 or 293 2777) if you wish to come.

**Sunday, November 3—Half-day Excursion to Bickley
Brook Reservoir**

Meet at 8:30 am at the car park just below the Bickley Brook Reservoir wall. Travelling from Perth on the Tonkin Highway, turn left into Gosnells Road East (Reservoir is signposted), then left into Reservoir Road and right into Maddington/Hardinge Road to the car park.

We have a good chance of seeing Emu-wrens, plus all our favourites!

Leader: Bill McRoberts

**Sunday, November 10 — Full-day Excursion — Peel
Inlet Boat Trip**

Early booking is required, so phone the RAOU office and leave your name, phone number, and number of people who will be attending. Cost and meeting directions will be given to you.

We should see breeding waterbirds around the inlet.

Tea, coffee, and cool drinks are available on board at cost. Barbeque facilities are also available, so bring a BBQ pack or a packed lunch.

Leader: Clive Napier

Wednesday, November 13 — Mid-Week Walk at Bungendore Park

Meet at 8:30 am at the Park entrance on Admiral Road, just past the entrance to the Emmaus Christian School, on the right-hand side going towards the dam. Birds not common on the coastal plain can be seen here, such as Rufous Treecreepers and Western Yellow Robins.

Leader: Les Harris

Saturday, November 16 — Repeat of Full-day Excursion to Pipidinny Road, Eglinton

Our visit in July was a washout, but as this is such a nice area, we thought we'd try again.

Turn left off Yanchep Road into Pipidinny Road, Eglinton (an hour's drive from Perth). We will meet at 8:30 am at the end of Pipidinny Road (approximately 5 km from the turnoff). Be prepared to pay a small fee to enter the picnic area for lunch.

We'll look at four habitats during the day: the coastal dunes for Variegated Fairy-wrens, White-browed Scrubwrens, etc.; the heath for White-winged Fairy-wrens, Tawny-crowned and White-cheeked Honeyeaters; the swamp for waterfowl, and a part of Yanchep National Park which few people visit.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Sunday, November 24 — Full-day Excursion to Lake McLarty, Pinjarra

Meet at 8 am at the intersection of South Western Highway and the Old Bunbury Road, approximately 5 km south of Pinjarra, then turn right into the parking area.

We hope to see a variety of waders and other waterbirds and bushbirds. There are occasional rarities to be seen on this large shallow lake.

Wellington boots/old shoes are recommended, plus hat, insect repellent and water. Those wishing to walk right around the lake should take their lunch with them.

Leader: Les Harris

Monday 25 November Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Perry de Rebeira and several other members of the Western Banders Association will describe their banding studies of our birdlife.

NO DECEMBER EVENING MEETING.

Monday 20 January 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Michael Craig, who talked to the Group not long ago about shorebird identification, will discuss the impacts of timber harvesting on the jarrah forest avifauna.

Monday 24 February 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Harry Recher, Foundation Professor in the Department of Environmental Management at Edith Cowan University, will talk on "Sex, food and eucalypt forest birds". They may look the same or they may look different. Are there differences between the sexes in foraging behaviour?

Monday 24 March 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Adrian Dandeker of the Australian Customs Service will discuss wildlife smuggling (of which the smuggling of wild birds forms an important part) and the illegal importation of narcotics with which such smuggling is linked.

Monday 21 April 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Speaker to be arranged.

Monday 26 May 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Speaker to be arranged.

Monday 23 June 1997 Meeting — Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8:30 pm

Frank O'Connor, a member of our Group who works at the Argyle diamond mine in the Kimberley and has made good birding use of his time in the north, will talk about how local birds have accommodated themselves to the operations of the mine.

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8-day Christmas Island tour for the crab migration, breeding sea birds, rain forest and marine life. Departing Perth 10 December 1996 \$2320

For further information, please contact Madeleine Raffels at:

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We might as well call this a 'Parrot expedition'. Possibility of 18 species, including both Baudins and Carnabys White-tailed Black Cockatoo, Pink Cockatoo, Western Rosella, Red-capped Parrot, Naretha Blue Bonnet and our main objective — **Scarlet-chested Parrot**. Most of the south west endemics. Travel from Perth to Kalgoorlie, the Nullabor to South Australia up to Cook and the Anne Beadell Highway, then back. Three nights full accomodation at Eyre Telegraph Station and back to Perth.

26 April to 17 May 1997 Camping 21 days (3 x 4WD convoy)

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