



# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of Birds Australia—WA Group  
(a division of Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union)

No 85 March 1998

## ARCTIC WARBLER AT BROOME: FIRST MAINLAND RECORD

It's confirmed — one shouldn't go anywhere without one's 'binos', and that includes the loo! From my vantage point on the morning of 23 January, I spied through the fly screen a bird that I didn't immediately recognise, foraging quietly at the base of a Bauhinia (*Lysiphyllum cunninghamii*). I asked Jan to pass my binoculars and when I trained them on the bird was nearly dethroned! Hopping around, not seven metres away was a *Phylloscopus* (Leaf) Warbler. Being of Pommy stock, that bit was easy, but which one? This was going to be an ID problem, but a hardship that I was prepared to suffer, even if it was my birthday.

Both of us, still naked (I am sorry but rare bird reports must be accurate) crept from window to window viewing and frantically scribbling notes and sketches. The bird stayed in view for about two minutes before moving a short distance, but out of view. We quickly donned clothes and went out for what were further brief views. Left with the impression that the bird was an Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*) we knew that a confirmed ID would be tricky. Deciding that our best chance would be to catch the bird and carry out detailed measurements and plumage descriptions we quickly put up one net. We got further good views at 9.30 am, one hour and fifty minutes after we had first seen the bird and took further detailed notes. We ventured a further two mist nets and the bird duly obliged by flying into one of them. Fifty photographs and numerous data sheets later the bird flew off strongly into

a nearby Pindan Wattle (*Acacia eriopoda*). After a shake to rid itself of my presence it began to forage again.

We saw the bird on the two subsequent days at 18:00 (24/1/98) and 13:10 (25/1/98) but have not seen it since.

The obvious field characteristics were as follows:

Longish body, smaller than Clamorous Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*).

Long, not broad, pale yellow supercilium from in front of the eye, curving down to and on to the sides of the nape. Yellow ear-coverts streaked with olive grey.

Yellow wash on chin, faint streaking on breast, and a pale belly. Olive upperparts.

Largish bill showing an orangey base to lower mandible with dark horn upper.

Pinkish pale legs.

Pale yellow incomplete wing bar.

The bird called on a couple of occasions. Each time the call was a harsh, distinctive and relatively loud scolding 'trrrrick trrrrick' or 'chrrrick chrrrick'.

In the hand we were able to refine some of the details: the legs were pale with the rear of the tarsus being a very pale yellow, the wing showed five

secondary coverts tipped pale yellow, the fifth primary was not emarginated and the pale belly had a yellow wash.

All the indications were that the bird was an Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*). After release, with the use of reference material (including Cramp 1982, Harris *et al.* 1990, King *et al.* 1989, Pizzey and Knight 1997, Simpson and Day 1995 and Slater *et al.* 1986), data



sheets, primary projection and wing formulae, we concluded that it really was an Arctic Warbler. This appears to be the first record for mainland Australia (other reports have come from Scott Reef, an oil rig off Dampier, Ashmore Reef and the Lacepede Islands).

Other similar *Phylloscopus* warblers to identify from Arctic are Greenish Warbler (*P. trochiloides*) and Large-billed Leaf-Warbler (*P. magnirostris*). Large-billed is a sedentary species with a different facial pattern and would be unexpected in such latitudes. Greenish, the more likely, can be ruled out on the wing formulae and the emarginated 5th primary (not emarginated in the Arctic); calls are also different.

So the lesson from all of this, bar the necessity for detailed measurements and meticulous note-taking, is never, never go **anywhere** without your binoculars!

#### Acknowledgments:

Thanks to Mavis Russell, George Swann and Janet Sparrow for field identification and processing assistance, David Eades for telephone advice on photographic recording and data collection and Phil Joy for spreading the glad tidings via the internet.

#### References:

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**Chris Hassell**

**Editors' note:** three full colour pictures of this bird can be found on the internet at <http://cygnus.uwa.edu.au/~austecol/observatories/broome.htm>

## 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.

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 the editors what you actually saw. Providing extra details also assists the editors to provide extra information to readers.

Perhaps the most exciting reports this issue are not one, but three, reports of *Phylloscopus* warblers, probably all **Arctic Warblers**. Also, two **House Swifts** have just been reported from Broome, but details were not to hand at the time of going to press. If confirmed, this will be a first record for WA.

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

**Freckled Duck** - 4, 23/11/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC, TK \* 5, 27/12/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC, GM, JP (highest number recorded at this wetland)

**Australasian Shoveler** - 810, 20/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (highest number recorded at this wetland)

**Grey Teal** - 15 500, 25/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK (highest number recorded at this wetland)

**Chestnut Teal** - 5, 22/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - FO

**Hoary-headed Grebe** - 3386, 20/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (highest number recorded at this wetland)

**Southern Giant-Petrel** - 1, 26/12/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

**Great-winged Petrel** - 1-2 birds on 4 days 24/11 - 16/12/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

**White-headed Petrel** - 1, 21/11 and 1, 12/12/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

**Prion sp.** - 1, 24/11/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

**Hutton's Shearwater** - 10, 21/11 and 10, 24/11/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

**Little Shearwater** - 1, 9/11/97, beachwashed, Yokinup Bay, Cape Arid National Park (Esperance) - AR

**Black-browed Albatross** - 1, 11/12/97, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual at this time of year)

**Whistling Kite** - 1, 14/1/98, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - RD & others (Is this species increasing in numbers in Perth, after a decline in recent times?)

**Spotted Harrier** - 1, 23/12/97, Port Kennedy (Rockingham) - RN

**Peregrine Falcon** - 1 male, defending a stick nest in a gum tree, 27/1/98, near Harrismith (Kulin) - MB

**Buff-banded Rail** - 1, 26/10 - 9/11, Jerdacuttup River, south of Springdale Road, Hopetoun (Ravensthorpe) - LHo, JH (rarely reported from east of Albany)

**Australian Spotted Crake** - 1, 26/11/97, waterhole at Pine Hill, northern part of Cape Arid National Park (Esperance) - AR

**Australian Bustard** - 1, immature, 8/2/98, Bibra Lake (Cockburn) - BBa, MaC

**Black-tailed Godwit** - 27, 23/11/97, Coodanup (Mandurah) - RN \* 19, 2/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - FO

**Common Greenshank** - 50+, 2/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - FO

**Red-necked Stint** - 3000+, 3/1/98, Alfred Cove (Melville) - FO (high number for this site in recent times)

**Long-toed Stint** - 19, 20/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (highest number recorded for several years)

**Pectoral Sandpiper** - 1, 14/1/98, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - RD & others (unusual at Herdsman Lake)

**Black-winged Stilt** - 2000+, 2/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - FO (highest number recorded for this species at McLarty)

**Red-necked Avocet** - 1250+, 2/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - FO \* 5150, 20/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC \* 5500, 8/2/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, JD (apparently the highest number recorded at a single wetland in south-west WA)

**Grey Plover** - 3, 22/11/97, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale-Kelmscott) - BBa

**Hooded Plover** - 29 including 2 juveniles, 23/11/97, Crystal Lake (Esperance) - EBOG per AR \* 2, 2/1/98, Kilcarnup Beach (Augusta-Margaret River) - RN \* 2, 3/1/98, Cowaramup Bay (Augusta-Margaret River) - DM \* c. 90, 5/1/98, Bennetts Lake, Dunn Rock Nature Reserve (Lake Grace) - JB, JuB \* 1 adult, 10/1/98, Lake Cooloongup (Rockingham) - MS \* 222 including 30 immatures, 6/2/98, at a dry lake near Mullet Lake (Esperance) - AR

**Red-kneed Dotterel** - 1, 28/12/97, Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CNe (first record for this wetland) \* 5, 2/12/97, Pelican Point, Swan estuary (Subiaco) - FO (first record for Pelican Point)

**Banded Lapwing** - 2 with 2 chicks, 2/1/98, farmland near Kilcarnup Beach (Augusta-Margaret River) - RN

**Oriental Pratincole** - 1, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - JB, JuB (details elsewhere in this issue)

**Gull-billed Tern** - 3, 18/1/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JB, JuB (not previously reported from McLarty)

possible **Common Tern** - 1, 12/10/97, Ewans Lake (nr Mullet Lake), Esperance Lakes NR (Esperance) - AR (Note: a detailed description is needed to confidently identify terns from this group, for which there are very few records from the south coast (see eg WABN 83: 12-14))

**Southern Emu-wren** - 1+, 6/11/97, Ellis Brook (Gosnells) - HvW

**Red-capped Robin** - 1+, 6/11/97, Ellis Brook (Gosnells) - HvW

**Chestnut-breasted Mannikin** - 2, 28/12/97, Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CNe (first record for this wetland)

**European Goldfinch** - 2, 5/97, Maylands (Stirling) - DD (possibly escaped from an aviary)

**Fairy Martin** - 1, 9/12/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TD, MaC & BAWA excursion

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

**Black Swan** - 1, 13/12/97, Port Hedland, in backyard pool (Port Hedland) - DG (not often recorded in this area)

**Black-breasted Buzzard** - 1, 17/12/97, De Grey River crossing on the Yarrie - Marble Bar road (East Pilbara) - MC

**Grey Falcon** - 2 (male and female), 12/11/97, 53 km S of Nullagine (East Pilbara) - JB, WB \* 3 (2 adults and 1 juvenile), 20/11/97 Meentheena Station, c. 80 km E of Marble Bar (East Pilbara) - JB, WB

**Caspian Tern** - 4, 15/12/97, De Grey River crossing on the Yarrie - Marble Bar road (East Pilbara) - MC

**Black-eared Cuckoo** - 1, 17/12/97, De Grey River crossing on the Yarrie - Marble Bar road (East Pilbara) - MC

#### **KIMBERLEY**

**Australian Shelduck** - 1, 21/1/98, Broome (Broome) - BBO

**Intermediate Egret** - 6, 6/1/98, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

**Buff-banded Rail** - 1, 14/1/98, Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Purple Swamphen** - 50+, 21/12/97, tailings dam at Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Barn Owl** - 1, 28/1/98, Broome airport (Broome) - BBO (uncommon near Broome)

**Red-necked Phalarope** - 8-10/1/98, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO (details elsewhere in this issue)

**White-throated Needletail** - 1, 25/1/98, Broome (Broome) - BBO (rarely recorded in the Kimberley; details elsewhere in this issue)

**White-browed Robin** - 1, 10/12/97, near the office at Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (first record for Argyle)

**Phylloscopus warblers** - 1 probable Arctic, 17/12/97, Lacepede Islands (photographs taken) - GS \* 1 probable Arctic, 23/1/98 Broome (Broome) (see lead article in this issue: first record of a *Phylloscopus* warbler from mainland Australia)

#### **ASHMORE REEF**

067 **Tahiti Petrel** - 11/97 - JD

088 **Bulwer's Petrel** - 11/97 - JD

124 **Abbott's Booby** - 11/97 - JD

195 **Buff-banded Rail** - 11/97, common on W island - JD

424 **Common Koel** - feathers of a female bird, 11/97 - JD

447 **Collocalia** sp. - 1, 11/97 - JD

781 **Arctic Warbler** - 2, 11/97 (detailed description taken) - JD

## OBSERVERS

AR = Allan Rose  
BBa = Bryan Barrett  
BBO = Broome Bird Observ  
CNe = Clive Nealon  
DD = Dan Drakes  
DG = Debbie Gowans  
EBOG = Esperance Bird Observers Group  
FO = Frank O'Connor  
GM = Glenn Moore  
GS = George Swann  
HvW = Hank van Wees  
JB = John Blyth  
JuB = Judy Blyth  
JD = John Darnell

JH = Jon Houghton  
JP = Jane Prince  
LHo = Liz Houghton  
MaC = Margery Clegg  
MB = Mike Bamford  
MC = Mike Craig  
MS = Marcus Singor  
RD = Robert Davis  
RN = Richard Nowotny  
RP = Ross Payton  
TD = Tom Delaney  
TK = Tony Kirkby  
WB = Walter Boles

## Obituary

### F Norman Robinson

Norman was born in England on 22 October 1911, and after studying economics and languages at Cambridge, joined the British and American Tobacco Company and was stationed in Singapore from where he travelled widely in Malaya, Thailand and Borneo. After three and a half horrific years in a POW camp on Sumatra, he was not allowed to remain in the tropics, on doctor's orders, and the family settled in Australia.

After two years with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Norman transferred to the newly formed Wildlife Survey Section of CSIRO. Early in the 1960s Norman was encouraged by Harry Frith to develop his early interests in radio towards the newly emerging subject of sound recording. They used these techniques in an intensive study of Superb Lyrebirds in the Tidbinbilla Fauna Reserve near Canberra to explain the use of song by lyrebirds in the defence of territory and in attracting a mate.

In 1965 Norman moved to Western Australia where he devoted his expertise in sound recording to establishing a reliable census method for the Noisy Scrub-bird (renowned for its invisibility!), then on the verge of extinction.

After his retirement from CSIRO in 1971 he and Joan spent the winters in Kalbarri, where Norman continued to record a wide variety of bird-song, returning to Perth for the summer. During his time at Tidbinbilla, Norman had amassed many miles of tape-recorded lyrebird songs and he spent much of the last 30 years analysing these calls, to explain the widespread use of mimicry and developing a theory on the evolution of bird song.

The peak of Norman's achievement has been the initiation and establishment of the archival collection of recordings of animal sounds now held in The Australian National Collection in Canberra. Besides his personal research efforts in sound recording a variety of birds, Norman was extremely generous with his time and advice to others; he attended meetings of the WA Group

whenever he was able and spoke to them on several occasions.

Norman will be sadly missed by his many friends. He died in his sleep after a brief illness, on 1 December 1997. He is survived by his wife Joan, daughter Shona and grandchildren Ben, Gus and Emily.

A full obituary and bibliography will appear in *Emu*.

Ian Rowley

## WA Group Reports

### BIRDS AUSTRALIA-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 Birds Australia-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:

Junior ornithologists group — being progressed by Clive Napier who is arranging a field morning with interested biology teachers from several schools to give them an insight into the use of birding as an educational tool.

Scholarships for university students to attend observatory courses — two students attended the December course at Eyre Bird Observatory; the timing of the Broome courses did not fit in with students' study programmes although it is hoped that this can be rectified for at least one of the 1998 grants (subject to the students arranging their own transport).

Indexes of WA Bird Notes 1995-1997 and WA rare/unusual sightings — these two booklets are being progressed as time permits.

Launch of *Birding Sites Around Perth* — see report elsewhere.

Perry House maintenance — Max Bailey has been busy arranging for the carpeting of the office and the updating of the road entry sign to reflect our change of name.

Annual remote excursions — the Research Subcommittee (convenor Mike Bamford) has been asked to consider such excursions and members are encouraged to send in suggestions for these excursions which will be evaluated by the sub-committee, particularly as to how they would relate to surveys for the proposed No 2 Atlas of Australian Birds project.

Grants — Allan Jones continues to make submissions for funding for various projects including new rural brochures, a formal study of Lake McLarty and a Western Ground Parrot study at Waychinicup, as well as a revised submission for Birds of the Swan Catchment.

Trading Table — a sub-committee has been formed to organise the printing and commissioning of new artwork and the printing of new bird cards.

Printing of WA Bird Notes — our typesetter, Roger Watson, is helping our secretary, Margaret Philippon, to take over the role of typesetting; Roger, we wish you well and thank you for your dedication over the past few years in getting this newsletter into print.

Treasurer — and another change in our workers! Jane Venter is 'indoctrinating' Greg Wyllie and Mary Vaughan as to the intricacies of Pastel, the accounting program used by all Birds Australia groups; Greg's nomination will be put to the AGM in February 1998 and hopefully endorsed.

Finances — see elsewhere for the Treasurer's report.

Hooded Plover project — heavy rain in December in the Esperance area is making it difficult for the local group to find Hooded Plovers, a problem for the flagging programme.

Conservation:

- Mike Bamford has been appointed to the Wetlands Coordinating Committee set up by CALM.

- Lake McLarty — meetings with CALM representatives have been held recently and procedures are being put in place for the education of developers/prospective purchasers as to the special value of this area and the need for its protection.

- Amarillo — this development will be proceeding.

- Milyu Reserve — a jet ski area has been approved by the Dept of Transport just north of Milyu where most of the Swan River's remaining waders roost and discussions are continuing with the City of South Perth.

- Fairy-terns at Rous Head — Mike Bamford and Clive Napier will be meeting with the appropriate person at the Fremantle Port Authority in an endeavour to ensure the future protection of the nesting sites in this area.

**Clive Napier**

## TREASURER'S REPORT

The WA Group had a successful financial year in 1997 with everything in accordance with budget.

The outstanding feature of the year was the increase in the number and value of the grants received by the Group. This may necessitate a change in the method of accounting for the grants in the financial statements in the future.

The introduction of the computer accounting software during the year will be an important tool for a more efficient financial system that is compatible with the system used by the Birds Australia national office and some of the other groups in Australia. Those familiar with previous years' statements will notice a different format in the 1997 statement.

Due to family commitments I have resigned as Treasurer of the Group. I have enjoyed my year as Group Treasurer and thank members, in particular Max Bailey and the Committee, for their support during the year.

I would like to express my best wishes to the next Treasurer.

**Jane Venter**

## BOOK LAUNCH

Several times delayed, the launch of *Birdwatching Sites Around Perth* finally happened on 26 November 1997 — and it was worth the waiting. A big marquee was erected for the occasion in front of Perry House, and the event itself proved to be a pleasant combination of efficiency and excitement.

The lectern at the front was adorned with the logos of BAWAG and University Press, whose joint efforts had produced the second edition of the book. Neat rows of

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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 MSWord format; a style sheet is available from Perry House to guide writers regarding format
- WABN uses Birds Australia recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary.

**Deadline for the June 1998 Issue  
1 May 1998  
at Perry House**

chairs, an array of displays of our current projects, and an interested crowd of people, including many of the book's sponsors, completed the scene. Speeches were short, covering all the essentials mixed with a dash of

humour. Then the Governor of WA, Major General Michael Jeffery, gave a very entertaining account of his boyhood entanglements with birdlife before officially launching *BSAP*.

As the sales table hummed with activity, a catered morning tea was enjoyed — and then suddenly it was all over as people dashed off to other commitments.

Many thanks are due to all those *BAWAG* volunteers, too numerous to mention individually, who contributed so much to producing the second edition of *BSAP*. However, the publications committee headed by the indefatigable Allan Jones certainly deserves a special mention. The innumerable hours that he, Claire Mercer, Max Bailey and Phyllis Bentley laboured, painstakingly attending to all the details, will be appreciated by all who use this handy little book.

If you are not one of the 250 happy owners of *BSAP* already, you can buy a copy through our bookshop at Perry House. It sells at \$20 — which includes postage if you order through our office.

Judy Blyth

### WA BIRDS ON FARMS UPDATE

The survey of birds on farms and in road verges is progressing steadily. Many of the 105 surveyors currently involved have said that they enjoy the surveys and I always enjoy the notes and letters that often accompany the results. Some news is bad — of too much/too little rain, untimely storms and poor prices. Some are of interesting bird sightings such as an unusually large group of Western Rosellas (116) and of Dusky Woodswallows (105) last autumn at a Kojonup farm. Special pleasure has been found in learning to identify and even to see more species, and in observing the progress of nesting including, for one lucky surveyor, the growth and development of a Wedge-tailed Eagle chick. A Gingin farmer noted that White-winged Fairy-wrens whose nest proved subject to wetting inside from the garden sprinkler, built an additional lean-to to solve the problem.

#### Survey records received for farms and road verges (January 1998)

No of surveys	6	5	4	3	2	1
Farms	5	24	17	29	20	5
Verge sites	0	0	0	33	111	16

The goal is eight surveys per site.

The total number of farms being surveyed in WA is more than the 100 indicated here as a few are corresponding directly with the national coordinator. There are 160 Twenty Minute (0.5 ha) road verge sites.

**Survey Data.** The survey data are being entered in the Birds Australia head office, Melbourne, using the Paradox Database system. A copy of the WA data was sent to me last November, current to September. As yet it

is not possible to extract much information or do any useful analysis. Each land manager and surveyor will receive a mini-report at the conclusion of the survey. It will summarise the bird records from his/her property or sites. It is also likely to show records from 'nearby' properties and offer additional comment such as identifying those bird species that respond to changes in farm management. There will also be an overall WA report.

**If you have a query for the database please let me know.**

In the Fifty Hectare farm sites south of Exmouth, 169 species have so far been recorded. (Nearly all sites are well south of Exmouth.) The Kimberley site adds a further 43 species.

Brenda Newbey, WA Coordinator

## Book Review

### *THE BIRDS OF PREY OF AUSTRALIA: A FIELD GUIDE*, BY STEPHEN DEBUS

Birds of prey, or diurnal raptors, capture the imagination of human beings all over the world, and there are a number of very good books on the order Falconiformes for Australia. These range from the large, beautiful (and expensive) monograph by Graeme Morris, to the small black and white identification guide by Gordon Beruldsen. The group has also been treated exhaustively in Volume 2 of the *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. Stephen Debus' book is based heavily on that account, and all of the colour plates of raptors are included.

Stephen is a well-known research scientist, much of whose work has been on birds of prey. He is also a foundation member of the Australasian Raptor Association and an active member of Birds Australia. Perhaps as a result of this combination, Stephen's book is an excellent amalgam of high quality information, and a presentation that is very readable and should not frighten off anyone with the slightest interest in birds. A short glossary deals clearly with all of the words that may be new to readers.

This small book (152 pages) is extremely well presented, with a short but very informative summary of raptors as a group in the first chapter, and then a chapter for each of the identifiable sub-groups, the largest of which is the true falcons with six Australian members. Each chapter begins with a brief description of the distinctive characteristics shared by members of the family, genus or group of genera with which it deals. We found the summary of the taxonomy or relationships both within and between sub-groups especially interesting. After all, birdwatchers try to develop short-cuts to the identification of birds, and the most useful of these is relationship. If we know the features that make a falcon a falcon it will be much easier for us to identify the less

well-known members of the genus when we come across them. The study of relationships is also a great guide to help us understand why a certain species looks and behaves as it does.

After the introduction to each chapter, there is a very readable and interesting summary, usually three to four pages long, of the information known about each species. The headings are Description, Distribution, Food and hunting, Behaviour, Breeding and Threats and conservation.

As a field guide it is not surprising that Description often makes up almost half of the whole species summary. A significant part of this section is the comparison of easily confused birds. Perhaps the species chosen for this comparison were not quite as comprehensive as they might have been. In particular, given the tendency for Whistling Kites to stray out over coastal seas and for Ospreys to reach some non-marine wetlands, some comment about the diagnostic differences between those two species would have been useful, as they can be confused at a distance.

The information in the shorter descriptive sections is extremely well chosen and will both help to identify the species and help the reader appreciate the special qualities of each one.

Although the HANZAB plates are reduced to slightly less than half their original size, they are still clear and attractive, and they are supplemented by photographs and line drawings to illustrate key features of each species.

A thoughtful and thought-provoking concluding chapter discusses human impacts on birds of prey and possible solutions.

While we have not exhaustively read every word or checked every reference in the Bibliography, we did look for lapses in clarity of expression and for errors, both in the text and in the captions to illustrations. The book appears to be superbly edited and we found only one typographical error, and that a very minor one.

One thing that we think would have improved this book is the presentation of a distribution map with the description of each species. Nevertheless, given that anyone using this book will almost certainly have one of the comprehensive field guides with distribution maps, this is a minor problem. This book is less a conventional field guide than a detailed guide to the identification and understanding of a particular group of birds which many people find hard to identify.

Despite the abundance of books on Australian raptors, this small book is likely to be much used, both at home and in the field, by new and experienced birdwatchers alike. It is published by Oxford University Press, Melbourne, in association with Birds Australia, and the recommended retail price is \$19.95.

**John Blyth and Allan Burbidge**

## Members' Contributions

### A BOX OF PARDALOTES

Three years ago I designed and built a nest box for pardalotes. These delightful, little birds have a marked preference for a small hole in a large tree. Such holes are often the result of an old, long dead branch finally becoming dislodged after decay and insects have taken their toll. Subsequently the tree begins to close the hole with an overgrowth of new bark and sap wood. A pair of pardalotes once nested in the large Wandoo tree on our block in just such a situation but after three years the entrance was too small and now every trace of the hole has disappeared.

In order to cater for my intended tenants I built a wooden box about 30 cm long by 15 cm wide and 15 cm high. I tapered it towards the entrance end to allow water to run off. For the entrance I made a 2.5 cm hole and added an extra thickness of wood around it. I carved the extra thickness to resemble the ridge of bark found around tree holes. This feature provides a secure perch should the bird need to stop outside the entrance before entering.



*Striated Pardalote*

*Photograph by Philip Morling*

I placed this attractive property on the large tree at a height of about 5 m above the ground. It catches some morning sun but is well shaded during the day. Within a month of completion, to my delight, I had my first residents. Since then at least six broods have been raised in the box.

There was one extended period when the nest box remained vacant even though I saw birds viewing the premises on a number of occasions. On inspection I found that a bird had died in the box some time before. I cleaned it out and it was soon in use again.

The Striated Pardalote is one of those small birds which must be seen at close range to be appreciated. It

