

Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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THE DAY I HELD THE SCRUB-BIRD

Editors' note: This article was first published in 1967 in *The Passenger Pigeon* 29(4), 99-106. It is reproduced here with permission of the author and the publishers, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. We hope the article will be of historical, ornithological and personal interest to our readers.

Australia — an ancient land. A land of primitive and interesting flora and fauna. Land of the Kangaroo and Platypus and Lyrebird. Land of the Scrub-bird.

The Scrub-bird is unique to Australia and taxonomists classify it as the lowliest and most primitive member of the sub-order *Passeres*. So primitive that some consider it should not be included with the song-birds but placed in the lower sub-order *Menurae* together with the Lyrebird.

We have two species, the Rufous Scrub-bird (*Atrichornis rufescens*), which still survives in the sub-tropical scrub of coastal southern Queensland and northern New South Wales, and the Noisy Scrub-bird (*Atrichornis clamosus*) which tenuously clings to existence with one small colony at Two People Bay in the south-west. It is the latter, virtually extinct, species, that is the subject of this story.

The Noisy Scrub-bird became known to science in 1843 when John Gilbert collected four or five specimens

at Drakes Brook and at King Georges Sound. Two other naturalists, George Masters and William Webb, obtained about 15 specimens at King Georges Sound and the last specimen ever to be collected was obtained at Torbay in October 1889 by A J Campbell, who also recorded that he heard the species calling near Wallcliffe on November 4.

Only 19 or 20 specimens survive in the world's museums and these specimens, together with the notes of the naturalists who collected them, were all that science had. Between 1904 and 1960 intensive searches were conducted in all likely places in the south-west. But all were unsuccessful. The Noisy Scrub-bird had vanished into the obscurity of the Australian bush.

Ornithologists resigned themselves to the belief that it was extinct. Extinct! That eery cessation of existence which is the end of a species life. That grand finale of

which William Beebe said, "but when the last individual of a race of living beings breathes no more, another heaven and another earth must pass before such a one can be again".

For 71 years the sun aged south-western Australia. Ornithologists aged, too, but they discovered nothing about Noisy Scrub-birds. Then one day a naturalist laid down his fishing rod on the shore of Two People Bay, situated on the south coast 20 miles east of Albany, and ventured into the tangled



Noisy Scrub-bird, Two People Bay,
Western Australia, Jan 5, 1964

vegetation lining the beach in an endeavour to identify the bird producing a call which mystified him. The man was Harley Webster, an Albany schoolteacher, and later, after he had seen the bird, he remarked to his wife, "I think I have found the Scrub-bird".

He had! In December 1961 he positively identified a singing male. The Noisy Scrub-bird was re-discovered.

To me, a bird-lover since childhood and an ornithologist from my early teens, the discovery and subsequent reports were of great interest, but it was not until 1964 that this *Atrichornis* actually entered my life. And then only by chance.

I was unemployed at the time and between job-hunting used to employ myself at the local CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research Laboratory under the guidance of Dr Dominic L Serventy, the Principal Research Officer. On these occasions I mostly trapped and banded birds, made observations, recorded data and continued with a project I had started a few years earlier. It was here that Dom introduced me to an eastern states naturalist, Graham Pizzey, who had come to the west to film some of our wildlife for a television production. The same day Dom asked me if I would like to accompany him on an expedition to Two People Bay with the objective of catching a Scrub-bird for Graham to film. I was mentally taking stock of equipment we would need even before I had finished my affirmation.

During the next few days I busied myself repairing nets and packing equipment. I even packed a pair of calipers and a balance for if we caught any Scrub-birds their weight and "vital statistics" would be important additions to our knowledge. We could only guess at what size band fitted a Scrub-bird so I included a range of sizes.

My main concern was the mist nests. This type of net takes a bird quite well, the thin strands entangling the bird and holding it a prisoner without harming it. However it is intended that the bird fly into the net with some force and as Scrub-birds are flightless I wasn't very optimistic. Even less so with the larger meshed nets. I had seen Singing Honeyeaters slip through these without effort and the thought of a Scrub-bird of equal size doing the same didn't thrill me.

It was 3:30 am when I eased myself from bed on 5 January 1964. I noticed the clear sky with its yellow stars as I sat on the front fence waiting for Vin Serventy,

Dom's brother. At Dom's place we met Harry Schugg, an officer of the local Fisheries and Fauna Department. It was 4:30 am when the last of the equipment had been packed into Harry's car. Dom switched off the laboratory lights and we started on the 270-mile drive to Two People Bay.

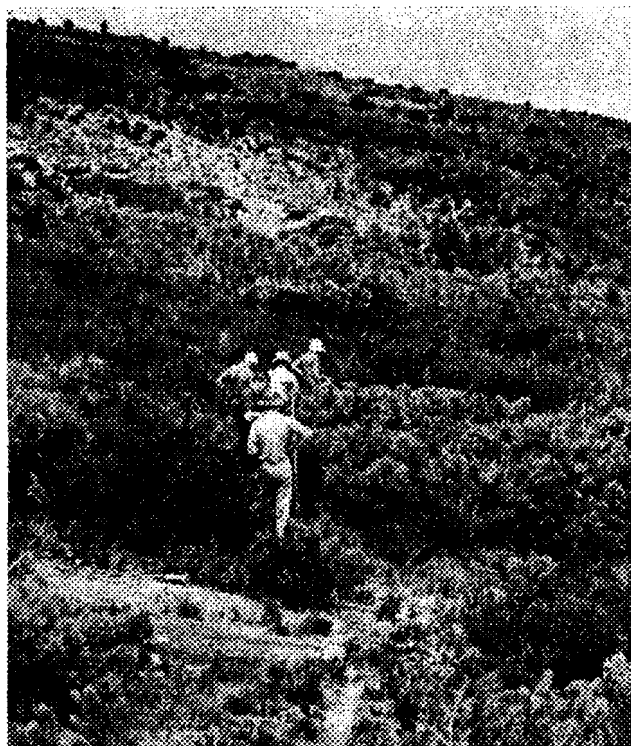
There we met the other members of the venture: Harley Webster, Graham, Mrs Rica Erickson and her husband Sydney. After introductions and the unloading of our sleeping equipment at a small hut, which was to be our camp, we moved off to the trapping site situated on the lower slopes of Mt Gardner some two miles to the south of the hut.

Harley had chosen this particular site and Graham had already cut two paths through the small but dense islands of tangled vegetation. I helped Graham erect the nets, listening all the while to the mingled trilling, chirping and calling of birds far and near. The two-way radios were tested, their antennae noticeably out of place in this ancient environment. I swallowed a few mouthfuls of water from a seepage which had broken cover and was clamouring down a six-inch waterfall.

The first trapping area looked promising. Three mist nets formed a line that divided the stunted but thriving vegetation in two and in places the shadow of the scrub walls alongside rendered the nets almost invisible. Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters flashed around, unfamiliar calls reached my ears. Syd, equipped with a radio, was stationed at one end of the line of nets. Harley positioned himself midway.

The rest of us went downhill from the net and began to drive, beating the bushes as we went and making an awful lot of noise just in forcing our way through the scrub. The joyous notes of the birds turned to harsh calls of consternation and I was looking forward to examining our catch regardless of what we caught. Foolish me, when I eventually extricated myself from the scrub my eyes travelled the whole length of the net, and almost in disbelief, I saw that it was empty. Slowly I walked along the net looking for telltale signs that something had hit and escaped. There was nothing. Not even a loose feather.

Harley and Syd stayed by the net while the rest of us went uphill and drove down. I avoided the denser patches of scrub this time so that I could get to the net quicker. I need not have bothered. The drive was as unsuccessful as the first. Harley pointed out that we could forget this area for a while as we would have frightened any Scrub-bird



Actual site of the mist-netting area where the bird was caught; Dr Serventy this end of net, author doing something to net, others behind.

well away. So we turned our attention to the other trapping site.

The second area consisted of a single standard size net dividing an island of scrub which was only waist high in the centre and which gave way to grass on the edges. Syd, with his two-way radio, was stationed on one end of the net. The rest of us spread out on the uphill side and commenced to drive. My position was on the extreme right but although I was only some 10 yards from the edge, the thickness of the vegetation and the rocky ground prevented rapid movement. Almost immediately Syd's voice burned from Dom's receiver "There is a bird in the net".

Frantically I struggled to the edge of the scrub and in a stumbling gallop tore down to the net. About a foot from the top a small light brown bird was vigorously struggling with the folds of the net which enveloped it. I promptly grabbed it and freed it from the tenuous strands which had worked around its beak, feet and claws, its head, limbs and feathers. As I did so I was hampered by the fine strands of net catching around the winder of my watch and the links of its band.

I didn't know what species of bird it was but was saved from this embarrassment by Dom who unhesitatingly identified it as a Bristlebird, one of our rarest species. Glistening, silvery flecks in the plumage gave this otherwise drab bird an impressive beauty. After a brief examination, during which it struggled continuously, tried to bite and frequently uttered a harsh, angry sounding call, I placed it in a specially padded cage in the shade of a bush. We then resumed our positions uphill. This time I slipped my watch into my pocket and positioned myself on the very edge of the scrub. Someone said "let's go".

We had advanced only a few yards when Syd's voice came over loud and clear with the same message as before. Less hastily this time I ran to the net and looked along it. At the bottom of the net, only five feet from the other end a darkish brown bird was jumping up and down and moving along the net, closer to the end.

I still remember very clearly how that first glimpse made me think of a Scrub-Robin, one of our other ground-dwelling species. And then in that same instant of time I catapulted down the net, flung myself to my knees and grabbing hold of the bird and the net, clutched both to my stomach. Confident now, I slid my hand in between the folds of net and gained a secure grip on the bird. Then, with the net still around it, I held it before me, almost too scared to look at it for fear it wasn't what I thought. In just a few seconds I noted its size, the beak, the legs, the wings and tail, and simultaneously made a snap decision. Then I shouted just one word "Atrichornis!"

I heard Vin repeat my cry as I turned my attention to removing the Scrub-bird from the net. It wasn't difficult. Atrichornis came out of that net as easily as an egg from a tea-towel.

Then Dom was standing over me, checking diagnostic features of the species, and citing them aloud in zoological terms that I had previously only read in books. "Yes, it definitely is" he confirmed "and judging by the plumage, a female, too". The first to ever come before the notice of science as the specimens collected had all been males.

I held the Scrub-bird for everyone to see. That she didn't have a black band across the chest like a male didn't detract from her. She was alive, this "Jeemuluk" of now vanished aboriginals, and that was sufficient. No sound issued from her throat. No flutter of wings or struggle of body. Just a gentle stretching of first one leg then the other as she tried to solve the puzzle of this novel situation. She was the most docile bird I have ever handled. The light reflecting from her prehistorically patterned body began to impress itself in the emulsion of twentieth century film.

As Dom banded her I think I detected in the studious concentration of his face and two dark observant eyes a mixture of triumph and satisfaction.

In between filming I rolled a yellow plastic band on Jeemuluk's left tarsus and sealed it with acetone. There wasn't any real value in this action as it is extremely doubtful that she will ever be heard of again, much less so anyone actually observing the yellow identity. But my bander's blood always runs hot and I couldn't resist the temptation.

Dom and I also recorded the "vital statistics" such as wing length, colour of the iris, and weight. This latter being the first and only in existence. We started to examine the plumage for moult but were interrupted by the photographers wanting to continue filming. Later on I noticed the primary moult of the wing but neglected to show it to Dom and didn't mention it until after the bird had been released. He was most upset and refused to believe me. However, next morning he asked me for my notes, but I don't know to this day if he accepted them as being genuine.

I noticed that our little Jeemuluk was starting to feel the effects of the continual handling and it wasn't long before it was plainly visible to everyone. By now she was disinterested in the happenings around her. Her eyes kept closing, only opening when something startled her. Her wings drooped down, almost as if they were broken, she not caring to control them anymore. When the wind ruffled her feathers she didn't bother to smooth them again. She was almost lifeless in my hand.

Most birds don't suffer any effects from being handled but a few individuals of some species seem to find the excitement of being caught and handled rather stressing. Cage-bird fanciers, including myself, are familiar with the sometimes violent convulsion of some canaries and I have handled a few other Passerine species which had similar fits, lapsing into a semi-coma with wings and bodies quivering.

And now Jeemuluk was being affected by the same stress. Not reacting violently, just fading away. Her condition was being discussed by the other members of the group. Some wanted to let her go, others wanted to keep her for a while longer.

As a bird-lover I also wanted to let her go, to release her to the sanctuary of freedom. I was thankful for what we had already filmed and learned.

As an ornithologist I didn't like the idea of releasing her before we had recorded the maximum amount of data and completed filming. The naturalist in me won. With a confidence I didn't really feel, I issued assurances that she

would recover after a rest and placed her in the padded cage after having first removed the Bristlebird.

Half an hour of this solitary confinement showed me that she was going to be all right and within three quarters of an hour she had completely recovered. We lost no time in completing the filming and recording of information and then with cameras poised we stood back, our attention on Dom holding her, a foot or so above the rocky ground at a distance of some 10 to 15 feet from the edge of the scrub. Set for slow motion filming the cameras began to record the stage.

Dom let her go. Her wings remained folded by her sides. She hopped on both feet once, twice, a few times more, and was gone. It was a sad moment, suddenly very empty. I closed my notebook and slowly began gathering our equipment.

She wasn't the last Scrub-bird I saw there that weekend. I arose early next morning and in the dim dewy dawn wandered around near the hut. The bush was seeping with the trilling and chirping of Silvereyes and thornbills, honeyeaters and wrens. A pair of beautiful bluish-grey rats were playing chasy around a small bush, their feet making little clicking noises on the carpet of dead gum leaves. Then I heard a "cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep-cheep" followed by a trill, come from the bush to my left.

Suddenly excited, I stood there, senses alert, eyes searching for any movement, ears straining to identify the sounds issuing from the darkness of the undergrowth. The call was repeated and I guessed the caller to be a male Scrub-bird. He was moving parallel to the trail leading from the shack to the beach so I ambled along it, keeping abreast of him and only knowing his approximate position when his call reverberated from the scrub and rushes.

He was coming closer now and seemed to have doubled back a little. I turned around and sat down on the trail facing back towards the hut. I couldn't see more than a few feet into the undergrowth but I could hear him moving around. I waited. He was very close. I could catch vague glimpses of movement, could hear the leaves and bushes rustling. A terrific commotion from the direction of the rats told me that their game of chasy was at an end. I could have believed they were trying to devour one



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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
- except for Observations, contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary.
- the full Editorial Policy is stated in WABN 74:10-12

Deadline for the June 1999 Issue
1 May 1999
at Perry House

another. But my eyes never left the green and grey obscuring my quarry.

For over a quarter of an hour I sat there, alert and observing every movement and sound. He fluttered, he rustled, he cheeped, he trilled. But not once did I see him. He was so close I could have spat on him, but blurs of movement were all I could see. I began to despair that I would see him, I felt that he would melt into the scrub and vanish.

Then, magically, he was on the path in front of me, no more than 6 feet from the rubber soles of my desert boots. He was too close for me to use my binoculars even had I

dared to move. He paused there, side on, startled, a brown symmetry of stillness, his black eye gleaming into mine. Suddenly the stillness vanished. He turned to his right, skipped some twenty feet down the path, and was gone. And I thought of the Jeemuluk of the day before.

When I held that Scrub-bird in my hands at Two People Bay, I was holding more than just a rare species. I was holding a prehistoric link with antiquity, a messenger now poised on the verge of extinction. It was the point of a triangle whose base once spread across the width of Australia thousands of Scrub-bird generations ago, a point which the hand of man or a quirk of nature could erase forever.

It was three years ago this summer that I held that *Atrichornis*, felt the softness of its feathers, the warmth of its body, saw the gleam in its eye, the life in its limbs, removed stray feathers from the sweat of my hand. I wonder if I ever will again. Or will the species disappear into that nothingness which is beyond the hands of man for all time, or until the earth is created again?

Robert H Stranger

Editors' Note When rediscovered in 1961, the Noisy Scrub-bird was restricted to one small area on the slopes of Mount Gardner, in what is now Two People Bay Nature Reserve. At the time that Robert wrote his story, total numbers were thought to be under 100. With the exclusion of fire from its habitat and translocations of birds to new sites, it is now established at eight separate locations between Albany and Bald Island, with total numbers probably around 2000 and still growing. It has recently been downgraded from Endangered to Vulnerable, and if the current program to re-establish it in the Darling Range between Waroona and Harvey is successful its future will be secure.

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.

Criteria for inclusion of observations are set out in WABN 88: 2-3 (December 1998).

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Pacific Black Duck – 4044, 27/12/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (high number for this site)

Grey-tailed Tattler – 9+, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC

Sanderling – 1, with Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (unusual away from ocean beaches)

Little Stint – 1 richly coloured bird, 3-31/1/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – TK, JD, HD (and seen by a number of other observers over several weeks) (details next issue)

Red-necked Stint – 11 000, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (high number for SW Australia)

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper – 4030, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (high number for SW Australia)

Black-winged Stilt – 1844, 27/12/98, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (high number for this site)

Little Ringed Plover – 1, 30-31/12/98, Bibra Lake (Cockburn) – MBa * 1 (presumably the bird from Bibra Lake), 10-14/1/99, Yangebup Lake (Cockburn) – BA excursion (see details elsewhere in this issue)

Red-capped Plover – c. 1300, late Jan 99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – TK (high number for SW Australia) – 896, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC

Lesser Sand Plover – 1, 3/2/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – MC (unusual away from the coast)

Greater Sand Plover – 1, 1/99, Lake McLarty (Murray) – TK (unusual away from the coast)

Great Skua – 2 in 2 hours, 11/12/98, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) – RP (unusual at this time of year)

Western Corella – c. 80, 12/98, near Beverley (Beverley) – JB, JuB

Mulga Parrot – 2 pairs, 16-17/1/99, near Kokeby (Beverley) – RD

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

Black Bittern – 1, 27/10/98, Popes Nose Creek, c. 2 km W of Port Samson in mangroves (Roebourne) – MC (description provided; Striated Heron also present)

Banded Lapwing – 5, 27/10/98, 5 km SE of Karratha (Roebourne) – MC (near usual northern limit)

Common Tern – 1250, 29/10/98, point Samson (Roebourne) – MC

Splendid Fairy-wren – 2 (including a male in breeding plumage), 22/10/98, c. 130 km NW of Newman by road (East Pilbara) – MC * 2 (including a male in breeding plumage), 22/10/98, c. 140 km NW of Newman by road (East Pilbara) – MC (unusual this far north)

Redthroat – 2, 21/10/98, c. 110 km NW of Newman by road (East Pilbara) – RT * 2, 22/10/98, c. 130 km NW of Newman by road (East Pilbara) – MC (at or near northern limit)

Grey Honeyeater – 2, 21/10/98, c. 150 km NW of Newman by road (East Pilbara) – MC

KIMBERLEY

Streaked Shearwater – 1, 14/1/99, beachwashed near Broome (Broome) – BBO

Short-tailed Shearwater – 1, 26/12/98, found beachwashed on Cable Beach (Broome) – BBO (specimen now in WA Museum)

Grey Goshawk – 1, 16/10/98, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham – East Kimberley) – JS

Grey Falcon – 1, 13/10/98, Manning Gorge (Derby – West Kimberley) – JS

Black Falcon – 1, 20/10/98, Ord River Irrigation Area, Kununurra (Wyndham – East Kimberley) – JS

Ruff – 2, 16/10/98, freshwater swamp on Drysdale River Station (Wyndham – East Kimberley) – JS * 2, 18/10/98, Parry Lagoons NR (Wyndham – East Kimberley) – JS

Arctic Jaeger – 1, 19/12/98, found exhausted on Cable Beach (released 29/12/98) (Broome) – BBO

Bridled Tern – 1, 22/9/98, Gantheaume Point (Broome) – JS

Yellow Wagtail – 45, 22/1/99, Roebuck Plains (Broome) – BBO (high number for this species)

OBSERVERS

BBO = Broome Bird Observatory	MBa = Mike Bamford
HD = Hazel Darnell	MC = Michael Craig
JB = John Blyth	RD = Rob Davis
JuB = Judy Blyth	RP = Ross Payton
JD = John Darnell	RT = Roy Teale
JS = Jonny Schoenjahn	TK = Tony Kirkby

BIRDS AUSTRALIA RARITIES COMMITTEE (BARC)

BARC, chaired by Tony Palliser, assesses reports of national rarities. For example, the Purple-backed Starling reported from Christmas Island by Graham and Gwen Goodreid (WABN 79:2-3) was an Australian first, was submitted to the Rarities Committee and subsequently accepted in 1998. In the last few months, a number of other Western Australian and Christmas Island cases have been accepted, and these are listed below for the information of local members. The format is case number, common name, scientific name, location, date. The majority of these records have appeared in the 'Observations' section of WABN.

Welcome to our 1999 Committee
and Chairman, Clive Nealon.

187 Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*: Christmas Island 30/05/94

200 Black-backed Wagtail *Motacilla lugens*: Derby, WA 30/12/95

213 Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus*: Christmas Island 4/6/96

223 Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae*: NW of Dampier, WA 26/09/68

225 Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma matsudairae*: off NW WA 14/10/96

235 House Swift *Apus affinis*: Broome, WA 08/02/98

241 Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis*: Karratha, WA 06/11/94

242 Blue and White Flycatcher *Ficedula cyanomelana*: Cossack, WA 05/12/95

243 Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*: Lacepede Islands, WA 17/12/97

244 Franklin's Gull *Larus pipixcan*: Broome, WA 29/12/96

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:

Proposal to incorporate — following unanimous approval of the proposal at the extraordinary general meeting held 18 January, the matter is being referred to the Birds Australia Council for ratification; if this is obtained, a notice will be published advising of this intention, with subsequent submission to the Ministry of Fair Trading for final approval; so there's still quite a way to go before we are actually incorporated.

Atlas of Australian Birds #2 Project — see separate supplement for report from the WA coordinator, Cheryl Gole.

Remote area excursions — keen interest is being shown in the survey planned for spring 1999 along the Canning Stock Route with priority to be given to finding some real information about the distribution of Princess Parrots, as well as being an Atlassing survey.

Public liability insurance — following discussions with the National Office and examination of the insurance policy, it has been ascertained that members between the ages of 16-69 years are covered by the national insurance policy when taking part in officially organised excursions/trips, and that vehicles are not covered; it therefore follows that privately undertaken atlassing is not covered by Birds Australia.

Conservation:

Proposed southern extension of Tonkin Hwy — the Main Roads consultants have been advised that Wright Lake does not seem to be a significant area as a bird habitat.

Wetlands Coordinating Committee — a meeting has recently been held (the second since inception) with representatives of various government departments, community and conservation groups (including BAWAG's representative, Mike Bamford); there has been particular discussion on the increased salinity in wetlands.

Signs at Alfred Cove — informative signs have been erected, advising against walking dogs in the area due to its being a "wader refuelling post"; sketches prepared by Judy Blyth have been used in the signs.

Mariners' Cove development, Creery Wetlands — BAWAG has been invited to nominate a representative on the 'watchdog' coordinating committee for the foreshore area to be ceded to CALM and a vermin-proof fence built to keep out cats, trailbike riders, etc, whilst allowing for paths, thus giving the foreshore much greater protection than it currently has; advice has been given on design of bird hides for the area.

Dredging of Peel Inlet at mouth of Serpentine-Murray Rivers — advice has been given on the utilisation of dredged material for the creation of an island to provide a suitable habitat for shore birds.

Exotic birds — BAWAG is concerned at the ever-widening range of the Rainbow Lorikeet, Little and Long-billed Corellas and the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo and would be willing to assist CALM in any project that might be established to prevent further spread of these birds, particularly the latter three species as it is felt that it is too late to stop the Rainbow Lorikeet from invading WA.

TAFE banding course at Broome Bird Observatory — BAWAG has donated a sum of \$550 towards the cost of a student attending this course, on a one-off basis.

Suburban Bird Survey — Clive Nealon continues to record data contributed by participants, with over 200 000 records so far; nearly 120 people are participating with 113 garden sites and 200-odd other sites.

Education/Public Relations — see report from Judy Blyth elsewhere in this issue.

Grants — Allan Jones and his sub-committee continue to submit applications for funding of projects including:

Centenary grant for Bold Park Walk — application for \$30 000 grant has been forwarded, with BAWAG being the leading partner in the proposed project.

Short-billed (Carnaby's) Black-Cockatoo project — application has been submitted for a Community Conservation grant from the Lotteries Commission for this joint project with CSIRO, CALM and BAWAG; a second grant application for this project will be submitted to World Wide Fund for Nature (Australia).

Swan-Canning survey — Natural Heritage Trust grant 1999 — a revised submission will be submitted following rejection by the Canberra office of the original application.

Hooded Plover and Ground Parrot surveys — see next issue for reports.

A representative of the Research Sub-committee will be attending future meetings of the Grants committee. The CEO of the National Office, Donald Coventry, has authority to approve minor projects.

Trading Table — sales of bird cards went well during 1998, especially since the reprint became available; it is likely that the Splendid Fairy-wren cards will require another reprint before the end of the year, with the Red-eared Firetail being the second most popular card.

Plaque to commemorate reintroduction of Noisy Scrub-bird colony at Drakes Brook Weir, Waroona — CALM has been liaising with BAWAG as to the best site for both the existing plaque and a proposed new one, in a more accessible location, to be officially unveiled during February.

Photo slide collection — Bill McRoberts is currently updating the collection, particularly slides of waders.

Lease of Perry House from Kings Park Board — a copy of the lease agreement has been received, providing for rental to remain as currently paid with a review in January 2000.

Office Manager position vacant — after five years in the job, Max Bailey feels it is time to hand over to another volunteer: would you like to take this on? See elsewhere for details.

By the time WABN reaches you we will have concluded the AGM and a new team will be running BAWAG. I have not stood for re-election to the committee as I have been in one office or another for 20 years and will enjoy a break. However I will still be helping out wherever possible and intend to assist in maximising the Atlas records in WA. Hopefully I will still be asked to help with some excursions and give talks.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank particularly the members of the committee who have supported me and the Group for the last three years. The WA Group is a great team operation and much is contributed by many others apart from the Committee. My sincere thanks to all who have contributed to our success.

Clive Napier

WA GROUP CHAIRMAN (outgoing)

EDUCATION/PUBLICITY — ANNUAL REPORT, 1998-1999

In 1998 to early 1999, BAWA gave 15 free bird talks, with Clive Napier taking responsibility for the bulk of these (to various service and golf clubs, TAFE classes and at The Meeting Place in Fremantle). Judy Blyth answered requests from primary schools and libraries for "bird talks". Over 20 public bird walks were taken, participants including groups of school children, the general public — and even a large group of endocrinologists in Perth for a conference! On occasions like Spring Fling in September, and Open Day at Perry House during National Bird Week in October, a group of BAWA volunteers ran public bird walks all day, and staffed our trading table.

Twenty-one BAWA displays, usually accompanied by a trading table, have been mounted at eight different

venues. As well as the above-mentioned events at our headquarters, other venues were York (March-April), at Atwell Gallery (April 19), Murdoch University for Environmental Awareness Week (in April), UWA for the Student Guild Environment Week (August 10-14), the WA Museum for Threatened Species Day (a week in September), Kojunup Wildflower Festival (September 26-28) and at the Festival of the Sun in Northbridge (December 13 — with a special display, “Malleefowl — the Original Solar Energy Experts!”)

Over the past year, various new displays have been prepared — “Frequent Fliers of Alfred Cove”, up-dated membership posters (with our new name), “Searching for the Ground Parrot”, “The Remarkable Malleefowl”, “Go Atlassing!” and “The Spectacular Seabirds”. With costs covered by the helpful grant from Healthway, four ancient green display boards were re-covered with new Velcro-friendly material.

Other activities have included illustrations for the Birds of Kings Park brochure and preparation of a set of bird photographs and thematic display, “Birdwatching around Bibra Lake” for Cockburn Wetlands Education Centre (for its permanent use). Ongoing tasks included responding to requests from schools and individual students for educational material, and arranging publicity for our public events, such as the week-long program of free bird walks during National Bird Week. One odd job was composing a caption about birds in the South West for a tourist map!

Handbook of WA Birds

The long-awaited first volume to the *Handbook of Western Australian Birds* has been published by the Museum of Western Australia.

The reference book to all WA non-passerines is the work of Ron Johnstone and the late Glen Storr.

For all species, information is included on distribution, status, habitat preference, morphology, behaviour, eggs and nesting. Full-colour plates of all bird species, full-colour, full-sized photographs of all eggs and distribution maps for most species are also featured.

The book is available from the Birds Australia Perry House office.

Price: \$100 members, \$120 non-members, packaging and postage extra.

The above activities have helped to take BAWA out into the community, and many thanks to all volunteers who have made them possible. Also thanks to all who have offered their old calendars and other bird photographs to extend our display material. Please alert your local library to our range of thematic photographic bird displays. This is a good way of promoting both our interest in birds and boosting our membership (as membership brochures are always available alongside the displays).

Judy Blyth
Education/Publicity

LIBRARY NEWS

The following publications have been accessioned since the last report:

- *Flyway*, Broome Bird Observatory newsletter, October 1998
- *Windows on the Past: Windows to the Future*, 46 landscapes classified by the National Trust
- *Volunteer*, Threatened Bird Network newsletter, No 6, September 1998
- *Wingspan*, Birds Australia journal, vol 8 no 3, September 1998
- *Galah*, Birds Australia volunteers' newsletter, nos 29 & 30, October and November 1998
- *Bird Observer*, no 790, October 1998
- *CALM News*, July/August 1998, October 1998 and November/December 1998
- *The Stilt*, no 33, October 1998
- *Tattler*, Wader Study Group newsletter, nos 17 & 18, October and December 1998
- *Emu*, RAOU journal, vol 98 part 3, September 1998
- Rotamah Island Bird Observatory newsletter, no 16, November 1998, Activity Program 1998/99
- *Queensland Wader*, no 25, November 1998
- *The Greener Times*, Conservation Council newsletter, November 1998
- *Swan Newsletter*, vol 1, issue 3
- *Bush Heritage News*, Hobart, Summer 1998
- RGC Wetlands Centre report, September 1998
- Lake McLarty Committee minutes, September 1998
- *Contact Call*, North Queensland Birds Group newsletter, December 1998, plus pamphlets on Redden Island and Cairns Garden Birds
- Perup Forest Lake Muir National Reserve/Unicup Nature Reserve, draft management plan, 1998
- *Enviro Link*, Rockingham, newsletter, issue 6, December 1998
- Wildflower Society newsletter, vol 36 no 4, November 1998
- *Mainstream*, Water Corporation newsletter, issue 8 December 1998
- Cumberland Bird Observer Club newsletter, vol 20 no 2, July/August 1998
- *On the Brink*, Threatened Species and Communities newsletter, no 11, December 1998

Liz Walker
Librarian

Members' Contributions

TAWNY FROGMOUTHS NESTING NEAR ALBANY

For five years Tawny Frogmouths have nested annually in Goode Beach within a north-facing 5 hectare urban area, bounded by roads; some blocks are still undeveloped. Goode Beach is 10 km south-east of Albany. Probably the same pair, or at least the same female, have nested each time. In 1996 they reared two young beside my driveway (WABN 83:9-10). In 1998 they nested 20 m behind my house. Four of the five nests were built on horizontal branches of *E. lehmanii* from four to eight metres from the ground, but one attempt was unsuccessful. The latest nest was on a horizontal fork of a jarrah sapling, *E. marginata*, 3.5 m from the ground.

The sitting female never left the eggs or young untended during the day and was not disturbed by me because Grey Currawongs were nesting only 20 m away. When found on 14 September 1998, the frogmouth nest contained few twigs so was assumed to be fairly new, but one young was first noticed only 11 days later and did not appear to be newly hatched. Two young were present on 30 September. That evening and subsequently their crepuscular activities were recorded in over 100 photographs. The young remained in the tree clump until 23 October. As reported earlier, a spotlight or electronic flash did not disturb the adults or young, neither did the camera, 300 mm telephoto lens and flash unit all mounted on a tripod less than 5 m from the nest horizontally, the operator standing quietly behind.

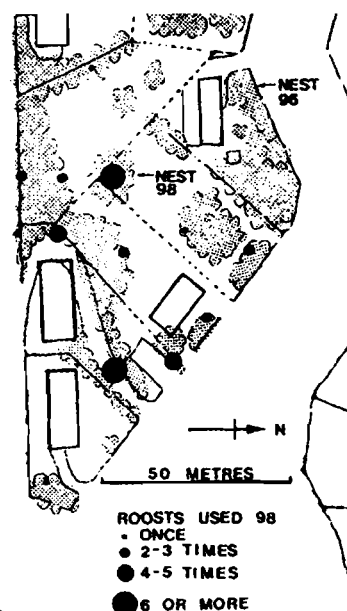
By three weeks, when the young were banded, they were hyperactive at dusk, stretching wings, flapping madly and flying actively along the nest branch, fed every 3-5 minutes by both adults, but always returning to the nest when replete. The closer photographic approach allowed the adults to be distinguished by their crowns: the larger female had a grey crown with feather shafts boldly marked in black; the smaller and more timid male had a dark

brown crown. In spite of the female doing all the brooding during the day, she also shared equally with the male the feeding of the young from the time she left the nest at dusk.

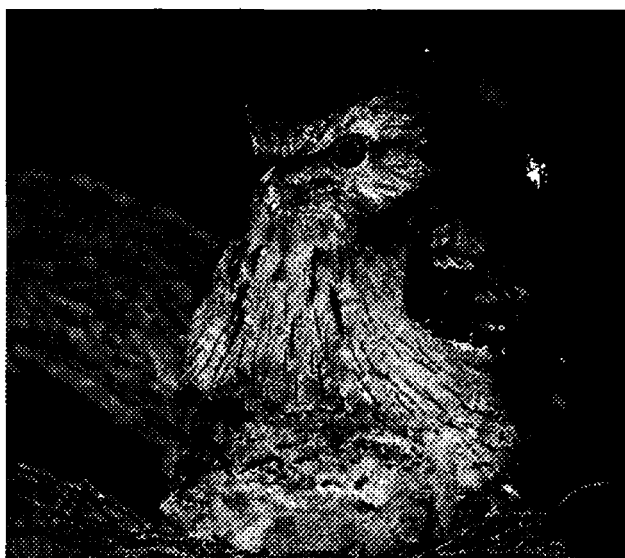
The young were fed on insects, believed to be mainly brown scarab beetles, known as Christmas beetles, but a stick insect (about 15 cm long, quite a beakful when the youngster was only a week old), a few moths and mole crickets were also fed to the chicks. No frogs, geckos or snails could be identified.

The adults were very protective towards their young. Three mornings before the young left the nest tree, a thunderstorm with heavy hail woke me at 0300. From the shelter of my carport, 20 m from the nest, I was able to view by spotlight both adults on a branch beside the nest. The young were so tightly wedged between them they could not be seen.

The extremes of weather during the next six weeks, heavy rainstorms, cold southerly winds and strong easterly winds associated with the noise of crashing surf on the beach 300 m away, all seemed to affect the family movements. During the subsequent month their daytime roost was never further than 50 m from the nest tree. The smaller youngster (possibly hatched a day or two after the first) seemed to suffer from the colder weather. Its breathing was laboured (possibly air-sac mite infestation)



Map showing roosting sites used in 1998



Male Tawny Frogmouth
Photograph by Vic Smith



Female Tawny Frogmouth
Photograph by Vic Smith

and it required frequent attention from the female, which would sidle up and attempt to brood.

The family progress was followed daily and they seemed to move in a preordained manner, as if the parents were showing the youngsters their domain. Rarely did they roost in the same site two nights consecutively, but sometimes they returned five to seven days later. Generally the adults chose a substantial branch, on which they could posture cryptically, but twice the family were found conspicuously crowded on a narrow twig: quite ludicrous, as if "kiddies' choice".

Roosts were never far from the bordering roads and during the full moon periods in October and November adults were seen feeding young on the road, calling them down to do so. Fortunately there was little traffic. By December the adults seemed to move the family into the national park immediately to the south for several days, but returned to Goode Beach during inclement weather. They were last seen at the roadside at the end of December. Both youngsters at approximately ten weeks of age had full-grown tails, seemed the same size and wore juvenile plumage similar to the adult male, with dark crowns.

Vic Smith

MOVEMENTS OF WADERS ON THE SWAN ESTUARY

For many years, observers of waders on the Swan Estuary have noted that their numbers vary greatly at particular sites, and Creed and Bailey (1998) have recorded a decline in the usage by waders of one of the principal sites on the estuary, Pelican Point (see also WABN 88: 17). There are a lot of anecdotal comments to the effect that wader numbers have declined on the Swan Estuary over the past 20 years, but there appear to be no data to support this observation. Annual summer wader counts that began in 1980 have been extremely variable and inconclusive, but recent studies have suggested that a lot of this variability may have come about because we don't understand how waders use the sites within the Swan Estuary, and how their usage of the Swan Estuary fits in with their usage of other sites in the region. Therefore, a small survey was organised to watch the waders on the Swan Estuary during the afternoon and evening of 19 January 1999. This involved half a dozen volunteers scattered strategically around the Estuary, recording the time and wader movements. A full report on this survey is being prepared for *The Stilt*, but a summary is presented here.

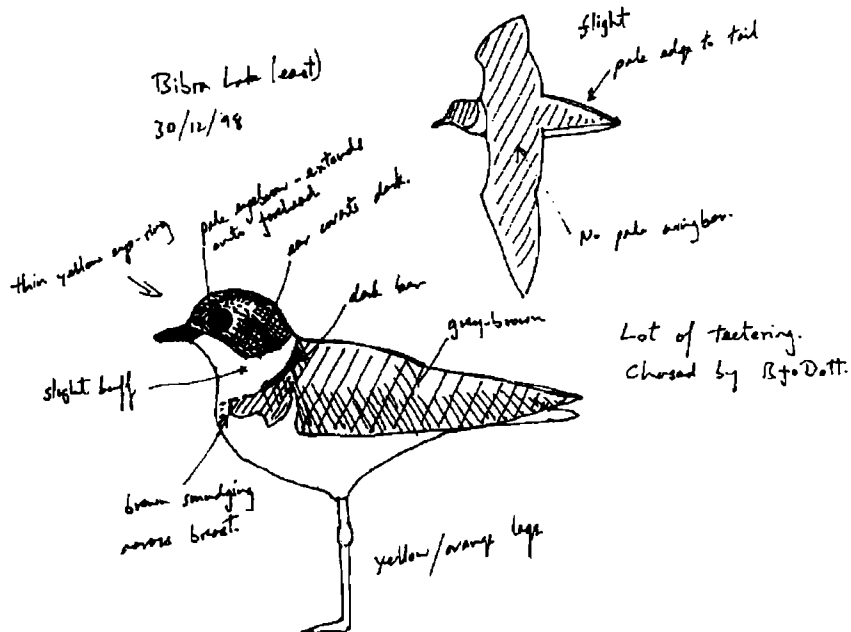
The period from late afternoon through to evening was chosen for the survey because that is when the tide was rising on 19 January, and it was already known that waders move around on the Swan Estuary in response to a rising

tide. What we wanted to know was where they moved from and to. There were approximately 2250 waders on the estuary when the survey began at 4:00 pm, with the majority (1600) at Alfred Cove. This included over a thousand Red-necked Stints. Virtually all waders were roosting on three sandbars on the northern side of Troy Park at Alfred Cove, and they began to move as the tide encroached upon the sandbars from about 5:00 pm.

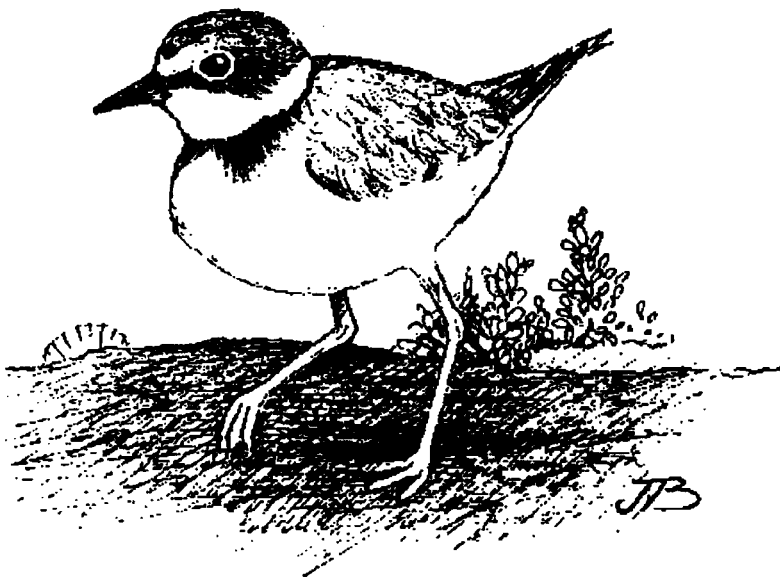
The first birds to move were the small waders. About 1000 Red-necked Stints flew from Alfred Cove to Milyu and adjacent beaches shortly after 5:00 pm, where they joined the 441 stints that were already there. This sort of movement of stints from Alfred Cove to Milyu on a rising tide has been seen before, but what followed was more interesting. There were three more phases of wader movement.

As the tide rose to flood the sandbars at Alfred Cove, most of the larger waders (Grey Plovers, Black-winged Stilts, Great Knots and Greenshanks) abandoned their roost in small groups and went either to the flooded samphire of Alfred Cove, or across the river to Pelican Point. Pied Oystercatchers did not move, but may have done so after darkness fell at 7:45 pm.

Medium-sized waders, including Curlew and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, as well as a few Red-necked Stints that had hung on late into the evening, left *en masse* just on sunset, at 7:25 pm. These birds flew high in a tight flock, organised themselves into a line as they would do if preparing for a long migratory flight, and flew west. About 300 birds left the Alfred Cove sandbars in this way, and at least 80 dropped into Point Walter, where an observer recorded their arrival and almost immediate departure. They continued to fly high and to the west, and disappeared at the limit of a telescope's range, still flying west. At that time, they were almost over the coast, and it is tempting to suggest that they were heading for the lakes



Little Ringed Plover
 Sketched by Mike Bamford at Bibra Lake



Little Ringed Plover at Yangebup Lake
 Sketched by Judy Blyth

of Rottnest Island, although they could have turned south to the more distant Rockingham lakes, or even tried to roost somewhere along the coast.

By the time it was dark (7:45 pm), the sandbars at Alfred Cove were almost flooded, with only Pied Oystercatchers and pelicans holding their positions. The small waders had gone to Milyu, the medium waders had gone west and the large waders had gone to flooded samphire at Alfred Cove and Milyu. The small waders had not finished moving around, however, and about 100 arrived at Pelican Point shortly after sunset. It is thought they were flushed from Milyu by people and/or dogs. At 8:00 pm, when visibility was very poor, the stints still lined the beaches at Milyu, but then they just seemed to disappear. Some were disturbed by parties of prawns, but many birds disappeared from beaches where there was no obvious disturbance. At this stage, we don't know where the stints went after dark. They may simply have flown to the southern end of Milyu, they may have gone to Pelican Point or they may have followed the medium-sized waders and gone west. Before the end of the wader season, it is planned to watch westward flying waders to see if their destination can be determined, and to do a wader survey of the main estuary site after dark, to see if the stints can be located.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following for devoting their valuable time to this exercise: K Creed, M Bailey, R Davis, J Wilcox, M Francesconi, K and N Ogden, M Taylor, M Pudovskis, and A, J.M and J J Bamford.

Reference

Creed, K E and Bailey, M. (1998). Decline in migratory waders at Pelican Point, Swan River, Western Australia. *Stilt* 33, 10-14.

Mike Bamford

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER NEAR PERTH

During a regular waterbird count at Bibra Lake on 30 December 1998, one of us (MB) saw a small plover of roughly similar size to some nearby Black-fronted Dotterels. The bird was on the east side of Bibra Lake, in a muddy area near the water's edge.

Viewing conditions were excellent, in bright sunlight at about 10 m with a telescope, but time was limited due to other commitments. However, two sketches made in the field are reproduced here and the following notes are extracted from MB's field notebook. The bird was seen from the side, and in flight, but not front on. The bird had a pale eyebrow extending onto the forehead, thin yellow eye ring, dark ear coverts, side of neck slight buff, throat and collar white, above a dark bar extending into a narrow brown smudging across the breast, grey-brown back and yellow orange legs. In flight the bird showed a pale white edge to the tail, but no pale wing bar was apparent. When standing, the bird was 'teetering' frequently. It seemed to want to associate with two Black-fronted

Dotterels in the area, but they tried to chase it away.

MB's previous experience with the Little Ringed Plover in northern Australia suggested that the Bibra Lake bird was of that species. On the basis of the size of the bird, lack of an obvious wingbar, the presence of a single breast band, a yellow eye ring and yellow orange legs, and after consulting Hayman *et al.* (1987), it was concluded that the bird was a Little Ringed Plover, probably a first year bird.

Several other observers saw this bird at the same site on the next day, but it was not seen there after the afternoon of 31 December.

However, during a Birds Australia excursion at nearby Yangebup Lake on 10 January, Dave and Jan Crossley, Bill McRoberts, Bryan Barrett, Clive Nealon and a number of other observers saw a single bird that they also identified as a Little Ringed Plover.

This site was visited the next morning by AB and the unusual plover was located amongst a group of Red-capped Plovers. This bird was observed through a Nikon telescope at distances less than 10 metres under good light and the following brief notes taken.

The bird was a small plover, similar in size to nearby Red-capped Plovers. Legs yellow with an orange tinge. Often 'bobbing' somewhat like a Common Sandpiper. Complete white neck ring. Somewhat erratic flight. High pitched call given when in flight (not further described in field notes, but later noted to have been somewhat like the 'pee-oo' described by Hayman *et al.* 1987). The upper surface was uniform darkish brown, darker than that of nearby Red-capped Plovers, and with the edges of the coverts narrowly tinged rufous. The underside was white except for an irregular blackish breast band, narrowest at the centre and broadest immediately either side of centre. This band extended narrowly up around the neck, below the white collar. The bill appeared black, and was relatively short — similar in length to the distance from

the base of the bill to the middle of the eye. There was a black line from the base of the bill to the eye. There was a yellowish eye-ring. The crown was a similar colour to the back (but note that MB showed the crown to be darker, as did Judy Blyth in her drawing — see below). The forehead was pale creamy buff and this colour extended to just above, but not beyond, the eye. In flight there was no noticeable wing bar, while the tail appeared to be similar in colour to the back but with white edges. Initially the bird was seen feeding on moist sand at the edge of the water. Later it was roosting amongst sparse low, herbaceous vegetation on a sand spit with Red-capped Plovers, and for a short while feeding actively in a muddy area near the edge of the water.

After consulting Hayman *et al.* (1987) and HANZAB, this bird was identified as a first year Little Ringed Plover, on the same basis as the identification of the Bibra Lake bird.

Later the same day, John and Judy Blyth saw the bird at Yangebup. The accompanying drawing by Judy Blyth is a composite from several of her field sketches. Judy's field sketch page also includes the following notes: "Active most of the time Restless feeding — little runs, then a brief stop to probe bill into muddy sand." The Little Ringed Plover was noticeably more active than the Red-capped Plovers.

The bird was seen by several other observers at Yangebup Lake up until 14 January 1999, but has not been reported since.

The Yangebup bird is assumed to be the same bird seen previously at Bibra Lake. To our knowledge, all observers concluded that the bird was a Little Ringed

Plover. The two species most easily confused with a Little Ringed Plover — Long-billed Plover and Ringed Plover — were excluded primarily because they each have a more or less obvious pale wing bar and are larger in size.

There are about nine other reports of Little Ringed Plovers from southern Western Australia (see HANZAB for summary). These include both adult and young birds. The species has been reported in every month from November to May with February being the month with most records (three). Five reports (including the first) came from Forrestdale Lake, with others from Cocklebidy, Kogolup Lake, Herdsman Lake and Lake McLarty.

The Little Ringed Plover is fairly easy to identify, but observers are encouraged to look closely at any bird suspected to be of this species because Ringed Plovers could also occur. There are no records of this species from Western Australia, but it has been reported from every other mainland state of Australia. The similar looking Asian Long-billed Plover is also a possibility.

Reference

Hayman, P., Marchant, J. and Prater, T. 1987. Shorebirds. An identification guide to the waders of the world. Christopher Helm, London.

Allan Burbidge and Mike Bamford

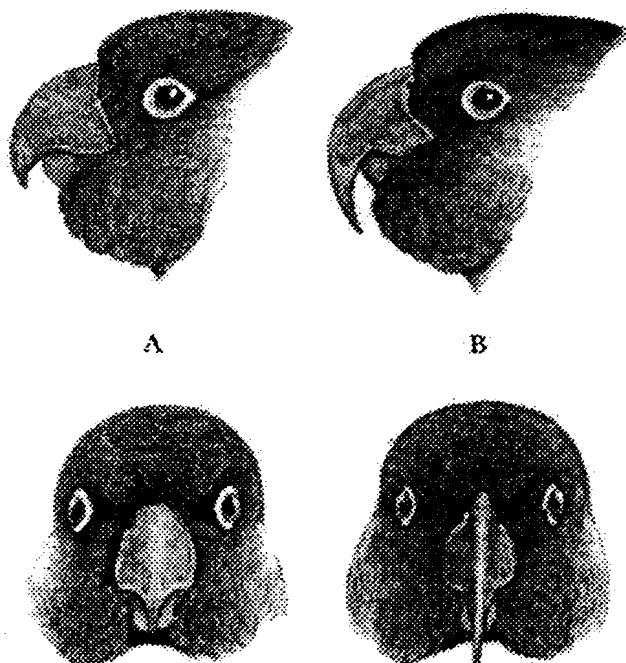
SHORT-BILLED OR LONG-BILLED — WHICH BLACK-COCKATOO?

Many people find it hard to distinguish between the two white-tailed black-cockatoos — the Short-billed (Carnaby's) Black-Cockatoo and the Long-billed (Baudin's) Black-Cockatoo.

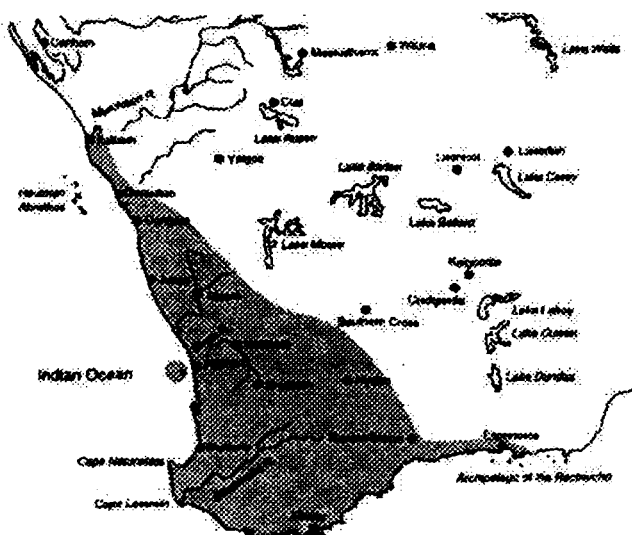
Their breeding ranges do not overlap, but the overall distribution of the two species overlaps extensively because non-breeding Short-billed flocks move into the breeding range of the Long-bills. The Long-billed Black-Cockatoo's breeding range is in the south-west forests, north to at least the Collie area, and east to near Kojonup, but non-breeding flocks can be found as far north as Perth and, occasionally, as far east as Albany and the Stirling Ranges. The short-billed species nests in the wheatbelt, but non-breeding flocks extend well into the south-west, showing considerable overlap with long-billed birds (see maps).

In the wheat-belt, if you see a white-tailed black-cockatoo, you can be fairly confident that you have seen the short-billed species. However, if you are in or near the south-western forest block, you need to look carefully because you could encounter either species. They can be difficult to distinguish by eye or by call — but it can be done.

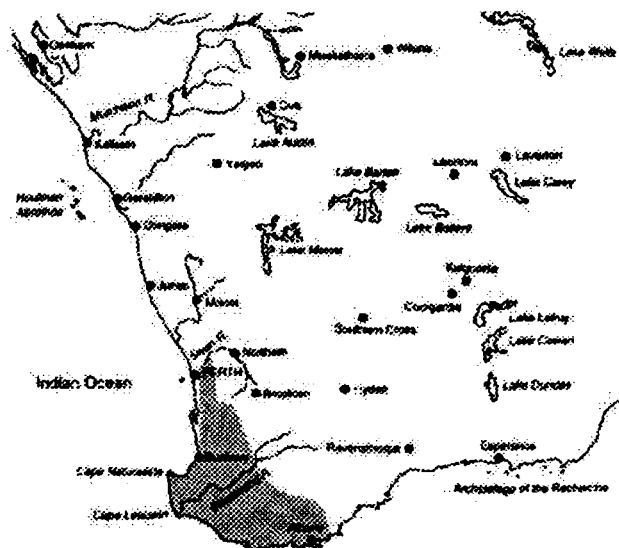
The best way to learn to distinguish them is to become familiar with one of them first. The key differences are in bill length and shape, and in calls (see below for details). Around Perth, most of the black cockatoos that come into the pine plantations on the Swan Coastal Plain are Short-billed Black-Cockatoos. Look very closely at the bills of these, checking a number of birds to get an idea of the amount of variation, and listen carefully to as many calls



Bill shape and size in (A) Short-billed Black-Cockatoo and (B) Long-billed Black-Cockatoo. (Reproduced from Johnstone and Storr (1998) with permission)



Distribution of Short-billed Black-Cockatoos
in the state



Distribution of Long-billed Black-Cockatoos
in the state

as you can. Then, when you come across long-billed birds and see their bills or hear their calls, you will have a good chance of recognising them easily. If you are in the south-west, white-tailed black cockatoos in Jarrah-Marri and Karri forest during the breeding season (late spring) are likely to be Long-billed Black-Cockatoos. Observers in this area could try and become familiar with these first.

Distinguishing the two species on plumage characteristics in the field is probably not possible. There are, however, differences between the sexes and some age differences that can be picked in the field. The differences are the same in both species. Males and females differ in the colour of the ear coverts, the bill and the eye rim (see table). Juvenile and immature birds are like adults except that in young males the bill is pale like in adult females, and begins to darken after the second year.

	Males	Females
Ear coverts	dusky brownish white	white or yellowish white
Bill	adults: black or greyish black; young: like female tip	bone or greyish bone with a black tip
Eye rim	pink	dark grey or grey

There are behavioural differences between the two species. These include differences in foraging behaviour and differences in calls.

Particularly in the southern forests, white-tailed black cockatoos feeding on Marri nuts without crushing or mangling them are almost certainly Long-billed Black-Cockatoos. With its long pointed bill, this species dexterously extracts seeds without crushing the nut, although it does leave bill marks around the rim. On the other hand, Short-billed Black-Cockatoos rarely feed on Marri but when they do, they usually bite into the nut and almost destroy it.

Both species have a number of calls, but for most calls, either they cannot be distinguished, or we haven't yet learned how to do so. The call that can be used to distinguish them is the long, drawn-out 'weer-loo' call. When given by the long-billed birds, this call sounds truncated compared with that given by the short-billed birds. The difference is not great — somewhat less than a second — but it is a difference that can easily be distinguished by the human ear. The trick is to know whether you are listening to the short version (given by Long-billed birds) or the long version (given by Short-billed birds) — and that is what has to be learnt.

The shape and proportions of the bill are also different. These differences are well illustrated in Johnstone and Storr (*Handbook of the Birds of WA*) (see illustration reproduced here). The commonly available field guides also show some of the differences, but you need to study the pictures carefully and preferably look at more than one field guide. Both species have a long bill — but that of the Long-billed Black-Cockatoo is noticeably longer and narrower. The key feature to look for is the length of the narrow tip compared with the total length of the upper mandible. In the Short-billed Black-Cockatoo this is about a quarter to a third of the total length of the bill. In the Long-billed Black-Cockatoo it is about half the total length of the bill. If you can get a look at the width of the bill, this can also be a useful guide, as the long-billed birds have a noticeably narrow bill. However, this is particularly hard to see, because the feathers often obscure the base of the bill.

The final thing to remember is that, even when you have some confidence at distinguishing the two species, there will be occasions when you cannot be sure. Even observers with much experience with both species do not always get a sufficiently good look at the bill or the birds might not give calls that can be used to pick between the two species. If the birds fly away before enough information can be gathered, even the best of observers

have to settle for 'white-tailed black cockatoo'. However, with care, there are many occasions when they can be distinguished.

Reference

Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. 1998. Handbook of Western Australian Birds. Vol. 1. Non-Passerines (Emu to Dollarbird). Western Australian Museum, Perth.

Allan Burbidge and Ron Johnstone

PROBABLE SIGHTING OF A MASKED OWL ON FRANKLAND RIVER

At about 8:30 pm on 2 January, we were walking along Myalgelup Road, just east of its crossing of the Frankland River, about 10 km east of the Lake Muir Nature Reserve, when a large pale owl flew across our path and landed in a tall dead tree about 30 m away. Darkness had fallen, but a full moon gave good light above the forest canopy and we were able to use our binoculars for several minutes although we had no torch or spotlight.

Our first impression was that it was definitely a *Tyto* owl, with a well marked, rounded facial disc, and that it appeared larger and more robust than a Barn Owl, with which we are both familiar. We both felt, despite acknowledged problems with shadows, that the bird had a dark brown or grey back, and although it was much paler on the front, we could see a darker wash across the breast and a darker 'bruised' area very obvious around each eye. The underwings and belly were very pale.

The bird was active and inquisitive, circling around us and landing in nearby trees several times, once within about 20 m, peering down at us and calling frequently in a harsh, rasping monotone. It appeared to be resident near our camp site. One bout of calling after we entered our tent was of 67 calls, each one about a second in duration with at least about the same time between calls. The owl called frequently and for long periods on each of our first two nights, but was silent on the last night, which was cloudy and rainy. We are both convinced that the calls were identical to those attributed to a juvenile Masked Owl on the Bird Observers Club tapes, and that the Barn Owl calls were considerably more shrill than those of the bird we saw and heard. The fearless, inquisitive behaviour was certainly reminiscent of that of many very young birds.

The habitat was probably appropriate for Masked Owls, although one tends to associate them more with the tall wet forests further west and south. The area was several to many kilometres from cleared land in all directions, not really the place one would normally expect Barn Owls.

The Masked Owl is a bit of a mystery bird in south-western Australia and little is known about its present distribution or status. The sort of habitat in which we saw the owl is very extensive east of Manjimup and perhaps relatively little known to bird watchers. We would be interested to hear from anyone who thinks they have seen Masked Owls in the south-west.

John and Judy Blyth

SEPTEMBER WITH THE NORTH-WEST WADER EXPEDITION

Towards the end of last year I travelled to north-western Australia via the Murchison, Mt Augustus and Cape Range, seeing many interesting sites and birds along the way, and attempting a bit of atlassing as well (although still waiting for the data sheets which were running late). I had arranged with Clive Minton of the Australian Wader Studies Group (AWSG) to meet up with the 1998 North-west Wader Expedition, the 18th to date and lasting this year from the beginning of August to the end of October. This expedition was planned to coincide with the arrival of thousands of waders from their breeding sites in the northern hemisphere, and the group were attempting to document the arrival of the various species, and examine age groups, moult, and other characteristics of the birds.

I joined the expedition at Broome in early September and the next few weeks were very intense but also very interesting and rewarding. After experiencing a cannon-net set on the first day, and observing the thousands of waders moving from their roost sites in the mangroves at high tide and out into Roebuck Bay, I was ready for the weeks ahead. Being a novice in the art of wader identification, I had decided that throwing myself in the deep end with an expedition of this nature would help me immensely, and that was definitely to be the case.

We moved down to Eighty Mile Beach (which is considerably longer than 80 miles), and undertook cannon-netting on just about every day (including 'rest' days) catching and processing a wide variety of species including Red-necked Stint, Bar-tailed Godwit, Great Knot, Red Knot, Terek Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey-tailed Tattler, Red-capped Plover, Oriental Plover, Greater Sand Plover and Gull-billed, Lesser Crested and Whiskered Tern. There were sometimes as many as ten species in a single catch, and quite often several hundred birds to be processed, including wing and bill measurements, an assessment of wing moult and estimation of age, and attachment of yellow leg flags on the birds. The art of setting the net, camouflaging it, and then 'twinkling' the birds toward the net continued to be a source of constant debate at the communication sessions in the evening, and in most cases we managed a satisfactory catch. Towards the end of the seven-day stay there was some suspicion that the birds were waking up to us, occasionally seeming to stand everywhere on the beach other than directly in front of the net.

We finished up our stay at Eighty Mile Beach with a beach count, dividing the beach up into 10 km sectors that were surveyed by teams of four to five people. We saw tens of thousands of birds in our section, and the total count had increased from about 30 000 birds in early August, to 60 000 in late August, and over 200 000 birds by mid September when we completed our count. I must also mention the great piles of fish that the fishermen at Eighty Mile Beach donated to the expedition, presumably in compensation for waking us up at four in the morning with their noisy vehicles. The abundant hermit crabs and the excellent hot water bore shower were also of note at Anna Plains.

The team then moved to Port Hedland saltworks, where the ponds support a variety of waders. Just outside our doorstep at camp, we were able to observe Banded Stilt, Red-necked Avocet, occasional groups of Little Black Cormorants and pelicans, Little and Great Egret, Royal Spoonbill, and waders including Eastern Curlew, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and of particular interest Asian Dowitcher and Broad-billed Sandpiper, which were in fairly good numbers. We undertook cannon-netting during the day and then mist netting over the knee-deep sticky mud at night, mist-netting yielding 'Sharpies', 'Curlew Sands', Red-necked Stint, Grey-tailed Tattler, a single Pied Oystercatcher, Greater and Lesser Sand Plover, Red Knot, Asian Dowitcher, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Red-capped Plover. Cannon-netting was mostly good for 'Curlew Sands', 'Sharpies' and Red-capped Plovers, with some Ruddy Turnstones. Of interest at Port Hedland were the huge numbers of midges on the ponds, resulting in birds feeding away from the water and up onto the road, so that a cannon-net was set up on the road and a catch made with some degree of success.

**"...biggest catch
I had seen ..."**

After our stint (excuse the pun) at Port Hedland, it was a long day's drive (600 km) back to the BBO, and the usual cacophony of Rufous Whistlers, Pied Butcherbirds, Restless Flycatchers and doves, etc, waking us each morning for breakfast and then down to the beach to set the cannon net. Our first attempt back at Broome was to be the biggest catch since I had seen on the expedition, and the second largest overall. Over 1000 birds were captured in the net, dominated by stints, Curlew Sandpipers, and Greater Sand Plovers, with a bunch of other species thrown in for good measure. Needless to say we were on the beach processing until the sun went down, and a very tired group of people headed back to the observatory for tea that night. Other catches in Broome were not as large but a variety of species were caught, and in one case it was necessary to scare birds away from the net because there were over 8000 birds in or near the catching area.

During our stay at Broome we were also able to explore some of the 'non-wader' sites, including mist-netting in the mangroves, at Pentalow's garden near town and at Lake Champion where we caught several Black-fronted Dotterels, Wood Sandpipers, and two Long-toed Stints. We also visited other great birding sites in the Broome area including the sewerage ponds, the port and Lake Eda. On one of the days I managed easily over 50 species, and I was able to add many new species to my list during the expedition including some of the waders already mentioned, Beach Stone-curlew, Red-headed Honeyeater, Brown Booby, Little Curlew and Ruff.

The expedition was an invaluable experience, not only because I was able to associate with experts in the field and learn a great deal about identifying waders through observing them and examining birds in the hand, but because of the wide variety of people who were involved, including many nationalities and points of view, and many interesting folk amongst them. Thanks must go to the expedition leaders Pete Collins, Humphrey Sitters and Clive Minton (apologies to Ros who was not in evidence), to Moris Davis, the wardens Chris and Janet, and the other highly experienced people, and not so experienced people, who taught me a great deal about waders and undoubtedly more than I could learn in several years poring over books and trying to identify these very tricky birds by myself.

Steve Reynolds

A YELLOW RINGNECK?

Today my attention was drawn to investigate a quiet 'beep-beep' call coming from what I expected to be an Australian Ringneck feeding in bush 50 m from the first car park on entering Pinnaroo Valley. To my surprise the call was being emitted by a yellow parrot identical in conformation to an Australian Ringneck, which had only a yellow lower breast, perched centimetres away from it in a Banksia, 3 m above ground. With the sun behind me at 8:50 am I was able to view the two using 10 X 50 binoculars at the closest acceptable range. The yellow parrot had an orange band above the cere extending almost to each eye, the head was slightly mustard coloured, the beak was the same white as the ringneck but lacked the grey marking on centre. A defined brighter yellow ring on the nape — same dimensions as the ringneck — was discernible, the outer wing and outer tail feathers appeared to be lighter yellow to white, the overall appearance was the yellow as depicted on the belly only in the illustration of an Australian (Western) Ringneck page 28, Pizzey and Knight, 1997 edition. The legs appeared to be the same colour as the accompanying ringneck as were the dark eyes.

Five minutes from first being sighted the pair flew together towards the bush in the valley adjacent to the freeway.

Michael J Hancock

FAIRY TERNS BREEDING NEAR DENMARK

It is well known that Fairy Terns have nested sporadically for a number of years on a small island at Madfish Bay, within the William Bay National Park about 12 km southwest of Denmark. This island is separated from the mainland by a sand spit about 100 m long, and is easily accessible at low tide. I suspect that winter storms cause the island to be more accessible in some years than others. In any case, human disturbance is frequent, but the terns have successfully raised young in spite of this.

My understanding (eg from the *Atlas of Australian Birds* and the *National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife*) is that nesting Fairy Terns are susceptible to



Fairy-tern
Sketched by Judy Blyth

human disturbance. I was therefore surprised to find, on my annual migration to Denmark this year, a new nesting colony established on the mainland at Ocean Beach, about 7 km south of Denmark. I do not recall having seen more than the odd Fairy Tern in this vicinity before.

The new nesting colony is located on the Nullaki Peninsula (ie, the eastern side of the entrance to Wilson Inlet) on bare sand at the top of the beach, adjacent to some small, vegetated sand dunes and less than 100 m from the inlet mouth. This area is frequented by fishermen, surfers and others, and is probably more accessible than the Madfish Bay site. Wading access is possible only at low tide, again dependent on the season, but surfers make the crossing at any time to gain access to the beach that extends nearly 2 km further eastwards.

I noticed significant Fairy Tern activity on 3 January 1999, and investigated further on 8 January, discovering a nesting colony. The colony consisted of about 150 birds, but due to constant disturbance it was not possible to estimate the number of nests. I confirmed eggs in three nest scrapes through binoculars but did not venture closer. I did not see any runners and did not visit the colony again before my departure on 13 January. I was disturbed to find apparent cat tracks in the sand hills behind the colony, so wonder how successful breeding will be.

There was no evidence of breeding on the island at Madfish Bay, which seemed to be more populated by the public than usual this year, and with far less sand at the

rock-strewn site where I had photographed eggs and young in January 1988.

John Brooke

SOME BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF THE NEW HOLLAND HONEYEATER

New Holland Honeyeaters are termed aggressive. From experience of living among 30+ of these birds for some time it appears that not only do they display aggressive behaviour against other species, but also within their own ranks.

In my garden the New Hollands often appeared to be divided into two or three groupings. Disputes between two birds within a group resulted in loud calling at each other, with intervention by another bird rare. By contrast, disputes between two birds from different groups, while also resulting in the same loud calling, immediately attracted other New Holland Honeyeaters to the scene, so that as many as 20 would 'argue' within a shrub. It was noticeable the birds would fly to the scene of the dispute from different areas of the garden and on conclusion return to these areas when the dispute was over. Nothing more 'unpleasant' than loud calling resulted from these disputes.

The above were my impressions based on much observation. Certainty would require colour banding.

Inter-species aggression was nearly always directed at birds smaller than the New Holland, in my garden the Brown Honeyeater and especially the Western Spinebill. While the Brown Honeyeater was sometimes tolerated, even in the same shrub, the Western Spinebill appeared to bring the worst out on every occasion, mere appearance some distance away always leading to attack.

HERDSMAN LAKE WILDLIFE CENTRE

***** VOLUNTEERS *****

Are you interested in being a Volunteer
 at our Wildlife Centre?

The WA Gould League (Inc) manage
 The Wildlife Centre,
 but rely on VOLUNTEER STAFF
 to man the Centre
 Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Volunteers are given practical in-services and
 are rostered on with experienced staff, until
 confident to work alone or in pairs.
 If you can assist or would like more
 information,
 please contact

The Gould League Staff on
 Phone: 9387 6079 Fax: 9387 3492

The Western Spinebills were especially attracted to flowering *Grevillea tenuiloba*, a ground cover plant with abundant yellow flowers and dense prickly foliage. Whenever a spinebill attempted to gain nectar from this grevillea, if a New Holland was about the area the spinebill was sure to be attacked.

The spinebills were readily driven off, but the interesting part of this aggression was that the New Holland Honeyeaters rarely attempted to gain the nectar of the plant themselves. Observation of those that tried showed them having difficulty in perching comfortably on the grevillea and even if a flower was utilised for nectar the New Holland departed quickly and after having used one flower only, despite being surrounded by blossom. This appears to have been a result of the inhospitable prickliness of the *Grevillea tenuiloba* (among which pruning and weeding was conducted with great care).

Despite their aggressive behaviour New Holland Honeyeaters seem well disposed among their own group. For some time I was puzzled by the apparent feeding of one bird by another at seasons of the year when breeding or young were not to be expected. A New Holland perched in the open would have another New Holland fly to the same perch, face the first bird and apparently feed it. With binoculars to hand the behaviour was revealed as the bill of one bird stroking the bill of the other. Sometimes there was mutual stroking, but on most occasions one 'stroke' concluded the interaction, when (usually) the bird which had flown to the perch would depart.

This seemed striking enough but later I was to twice observe an arriving bird gently take the bill of the perched bird in its own and to clasp it for several seconds before departing.

These behaviours were more common as the breeding season approached and may have been part of pair formation or maintenance.

I have recently seen 'bill stroking' between two Yellow-billed Spoonbills. They stood side by side and 'stroked' the bills of each other.

I have not witnessed such behaviour in any other species.

Bruce Buchanan

BIRDING IN TASMANIA

At the end of November 1998, fellow WA Group member Mary Vaughan and I arrived in Launceston, the starting point of a trip that was planned to be mainly birdwatching. We picked up a car at the airport and after overnighting at

Evandale, headed west to our first destination which was Lemonthyme Lodge, near Moina. The cabins were set among tall Eucalypts, and here we saw Yellow Wattlebirds, Yellow-throated and Strong-billed Honeyeaters, while the understorey was home to many families of Superb Fairy-wrens. One of the walking tracks led us down into a valley at the bottom of which was a stream whose banks were lined with large tree ferns. This is the preferred habitat of the lovely Pink Robin and it wasn't long before we had our first sighting of a male bird. We saw them several times during our stay and spent some time watching a female busily building a nest. We also saw Scrubtits and Tasmanian Thornbills in the same area and higher up the hill on our way back, a brilliant Flame Robin with a fledgling.

Our next destination was the Mount Field region, where we took time to see Russell Falls and saw the Tasmanian Scrubwren there. On our first evening there we spent an hour or so at dusk by a large pool in a stream, in the hope of seeing a

Platypus. As we waited, Mary spotted a new bird, for her, a Bassian Thrush, and as we followed it for a bit, we nearly tripped over an Echidna which went right on burrowing for its dinner. This Tasmanian form is a rich brown colour and is so furry that only the tips of a few quills show. We returned to the pool just in time to see a Platypus that surfaced right in front of Mary. One morning we drove up the mountain to Lake Dobson, where we found drifts of snow banked up at the bases of bushes, and such a cold wind blowing that we abandoned plans to walk around the lake. However, the bird that we had hoped to find there, the beautiful Crescent Honeyeater, was conveniently feeding on some sort of alpine shrub right by the car park and he gave us excellent views for quite a while.

We headed next for Hobart airport where we left the car and were picked up by Dr Tonia Cochran, the owner of "Inala" on Bruny Island where we were to spend the next few days. Our separate house on her large property there was very comfortable (RAC 4 star rating) with all 'mod cons' laid on, including the birds, with many species living around the house. We had Flame and Dusky Robins with youngsters constantly catching worms in the lawns. One female Flame Robin was sitting on a nest built on a beam



New Holland Honeyeater
 Sketched by Judy Blyth

in the wood shed, having already fledged one lot from a nest in a different spot in that shed. The surrounding paddocks contained many Tasmanian Native-hens that were generally shy and unapproachable, but one group of four claimed the house area as their territory and were not much bothered by us. They had three small black chicks that were only a few days old and were mostly kept well hidden in long grass, but about noon each day they were brought out for a cautious walk around the edge of the garden.

A family of Superb Fairy-wrens also lived in the garden and many other species visited, the Green Rosellas coming in numbers several times a day. Some 40 m from the house there is a stand of white gums that is home to a colony of the endangered Forty-spotted Pardalote (as well as Spotted and Striated Pardalotes) and although the trees are large and the bird small, we were able to see the former quite well when some obliged by coming down to lower branches to feed. Also seen there were Black-headed Honeyeaters and Beautiful Firetails. On a half-day walk around the property with Tonia, we also saw, as well as many other birds, nesting Swift Parrots and watched Satin Flycatchers swapping nest duty. We also made a trip at dusk to see Fairy Penguins coming ashore to roost in the dunes, and at the same spot, hundreds of Short-tailed Shearwaters were circling overhead, waiting for dark so that they too could get to their burrows. After seeing them, we drove round some roads in the hope of seeing an Eastern Quoll, and we did indeed see five, in both colour variations.

After three wonderful days we were returned to Hobart where we were booked on a flight to Melaleuca in the south-west of Tasmania the following morning, weather permitting, hopefully to see the rare Orange-bellied Parrot. We were blessed with a good day so were picked up early in the morning and driven to the airfield where we boarded small planes, ours carrying just two passengers plus the pilot and co-pilot. The flight was smooth and most enjoyable as we flew much lower than the bigger planes and the views over the Derwent River and Hobart, then the east and south coasts were wonderful. Some 55 minutes later we landed at Melaleuca airstrip and as we walked the 200 or so metres up the track to the viewing hut we could already see some Orange-bellied Parrots in the nearby trees. Better still, there were a number of birds at the feeding table that is not far from the viewing windows, sometimes six or seven at a time. We spent at least half an hour having a good look at them. The hut was equipped with a 'scope and a video screen with pictures from a camera directed at a nesting box in the trees. As we watched, an Olive Whistler and a Beautiful Firetail also visited the feeding table. Eventually it was time to leave and board a launch for a trip on Bathurst Harbour and to visit the Wilderness Camp where a gourmet lunch was served. The flight back was over the mountains of the south-west wilderness, which was quite spectacular, and then the lush green of the Huon Valley — a wonderful day.

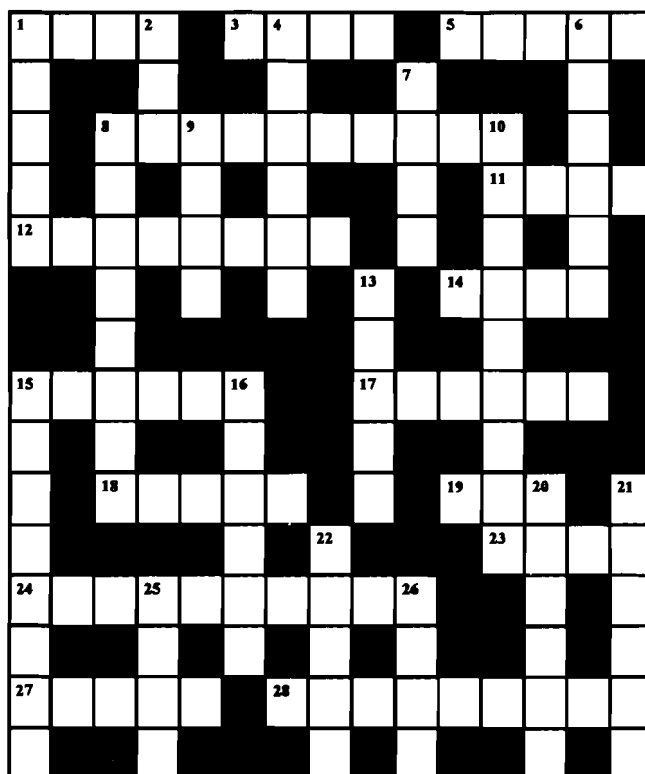
We had one more day which added a number of water and sea birds to our list, but it wasn't completed until we entered the airport terminal doors, as we added more new

species, among them Eastern Rosellas and Musk Lorikeets, in the car park. The list finally totalled over 80 species, and as this included all 12 Tasmanian endemics, we felt we had a successful trip, but not only birdwise, for we had seen magnificent scenery and met lovely, helpful and hospitable people along the way.

Mavis Norgard

Crossword No 16

by Pam Agar



Clues Across

- 1 Usual location of an Osprey's nest.
3. Kelp Gull has a red one on lower mandible only.
5. Beach scavengers.
8. Streaks.
11. Sanderlings prefer this part of the water to feed.
12. Small V-shaped marks.
14. Parrots can do major damage to this when netting.
15. Sounds glamorous but this gull is really grey and white.
17. The outer end, away from the centre of the body.
18. Variant in colour form of a species.
19. Northern river, feeding a dam now enjoyed by birds.
23. Most birds breed only once in this period.
24. Presumably woodswallows are this by nature.
27. Large bird of prey.
28. Sudden increase in occurrence of species.

Clues Down

1. A Hobby may cause this among doves.
2. Useful extra when bird-watching.
4. You may find pratincoles on these flat, dry areas.
6. Linear distance.
7. Fleshy protuberance on cheek or feet.
8. Iridescent patch on duck's wing.
9. Hard to find!
10. Not migratory or nomadic.
13. Possible state of footwear after visiting a wetland.
15. Having shimmering spots in plumage.
16. Written record of an excursion.
20. A Hooded Plover may choose to nest beside this.
21. Sometimes known as whalebirds.
22. An attempt to smuggle birds may end up here.
25. May change a petrel's direction of travel.
26. Sharp growth on leg.

OFFICE MANAGER

A great opportunity!

Birds Australia-WA Group needs a person to fill the position of office manager.

The duty is primarily to see that Perry House is kept with supplies necessary for the smooth running of a well-appointed office and act as coordinator for the volunteers who attend the office 9:30 am -12:30 pm Monday to Friday.

The position does not require visiting on a daily basis but regular weekly attendance is necessary (or desirable).

Living relatively close to Perry House (in Bold Park) may be considered an advantage.

The present incumbent has held the position for five years and feels the opportunity to contribute towards BAWAG should be offered to another willing person.

Expressions of interest to BAWAG Secretary:

Margaret Philippon

Tel/Fax: 9375 2068

Email: colmar@upnaway.com

Country Groups

ALBANY BIRD GROUP

November

Our outing to Denmark was 10 November 1998. The first area we visited was the Denmark Golf Course, and the second the Old Post Office and river region. Fourteen people attended the day which was hot for our area, but pleasant.

At the Denmark Golf Course, we saw 31 species including Western Rosella, Golden Whistler and White-breasted Robin.

In the Old Post Office and river mouth area 35 species were seen including various waterbirds, an Australian Hobby and a Red-eared Firetail.

December

The last meeting for 1998 was held on 8 December with a walk in the Torbay forest towards Lake William after which we shared a Christmas lunch at the Watsons' residence.

As we ate we looked across the Torbay Inlet. The Watsons have a wonderful view and we were lucky to share it. The day was hot and we were pleased to have shade. Twenty-one attended. All were satisfied with the outcome of the day.

We saw 28 bird species for the morning.

On behalf of the Albany Group, we wish all our friends at headquarters a happy new year 1999.

Vivian McCormick

Notices

Anyone for a BIO-BLITZ?

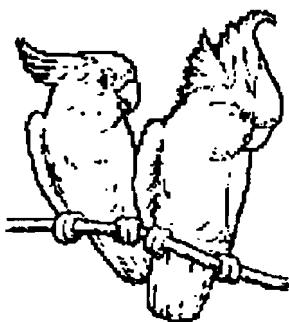
A "Bio-Blitz" is evidently a 24-hour event held over two days to find and record as many different species as possible over a designated area. Organisers, who lack knowledge in different aspects of natural history, but want data helpful in management of an area, invite outside specialists to bio-blitz it. Sounds fun.

The managers of Armadale Settlers' Common have asked BAWAG if any of our members would like to volunteer for their Bio-Blitz beginning at 5 pm on Friday September 17 and running until 5 pm on Saturday 18. The idea is to come along at any time within that 24 hour period — and add what you can to a checklist of birds for the Common. At 1 pm on the Saturday, there will be a close-out session to give everyone a chance to tell what they have found — so it's a chance to discover what wildflowers, reptiles, insects, and so on also occur in this patch.

The Armadale Settlers' Common is a 380 hectare urban bushland reserve, just minutes away from the centre of Armadale. If you feel you would like to help on the birds front with this survey, the coordinators are keen to hear from you as soon as possible. Please contact Brett Tizard, Executive Officer, Armadale Settlers' Common on 9224 3137, (or e-mail: btizard@cyllene.uwa.edu.au), or John Nicholson, the Project Officer on 041 175 6415.

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY — COURSES

Courses at Eyre are like no other courses you ever attended — unless you've been privileged to take part in one at Eyre! You'll enjoy the serenity of this remote location. Beach, dunes, mallee bushland, all far from the bustle of city life; good meals, a comfortable bed and a welcoming atmosphere will make you glad you made the effort! Each course commences on a Sunday. You'll be there for six nights.



Are you just embarking on your birding interest? There's no more friendly an introduction to birding than that offered by the wardens at Eyre this March, starting on Sunday 14th. You'll love it! Ring the observatory now for your booking.

On 6 June Belinda Cale will help you to track down such tiny mammals as the attractive Western Pygmy Possum and other furry animals that live at Eyre. Belinda's expertise in birds is also to be taken advantage of while you're there.

Eric McCrum and Kevn Griffiths will be at Eyre from 5 September. Eric will guide you around the natural environment and Kevn will encourage your artistic talents. Artists, there's a wealth of inspirational material at Eyre!

Then there's banding (26 September) with Perry de Rebeira, bird habitat studies (17 October) with Peter Sandilands and field techniques (28 November) with Stephen Davies.

INTO THE WORLD OF FEATHER LICE

Mammals have hair and lice. Birds have feathers and feather lice. The feather lice of Australian birds are poorly known, with only some 400 species recorded, and it is estimated that another 400 species have yet to be recorded and described, for many will be new to science. Anyone who sets about collecting them from Australian birds will certainly add to the existing knowledge and discover new species that may be named after the collector. Though as the late Dr D L Serventy used to say with some humour, some collectors have jibed at that and threatened legal action.

Thousands of our birds die annually on our roads and beaches and are suitable hosts from which feather lice can be collected. Further, these birds then have an extended value beyond their demise, and even mummified corpses may still harbour lice suitable for systematic study. And now that the second Atlas scheme is underway many people will stop and identify roadkills and collect birds from our beaches. One cannot overestimate the value of the lice that could be collected from these unfortunate birds.

Further, the WA Museum has just published a treatise on some local work and it describes some of the collecting methods. The work is "Lice (Insecta: Phthiraptera) from some Australian birds" by R.H. Stranger and R.L. Palma (1998). Most of the collecting was done in WA and off-prints are available from the authors.

Another valuable work is that of R.H. Green, R.H. and R.L. Palma, (1991), concerning lice from Tasmania. An overall appreciation and summary of the Australian bird lice is provided by R.L. Palma and S.C. Barker (1996) in the Zoological Catalogue of Australia.

Feather lice are interesting and valuable to the specialist entomologists who study them and could be of considerable interest to birdwatchers and ornithologists generally. The lice are important in their own right, simply as collected specimens, but currently Professor R Page of the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom, requires freshly collected feather lice for DNA analysis, in order to test the hypothesis that the feather lice have co-evolved with their hosts.

I would not recommend that you delouse your birds during dinner, but if you pick up a couple of roadkills or beach wrecked birds you could then make camp a little earlier than usual and delouse the birds during daylight.

The lice should be put into a vial of 70% ethanol as collected. Being a birdwatcher you will be able to identify the bird to the species level, while the entomologist will identify the lice to the species level — and sometimes to the sub-species level (How do they do that?) — except where the lice are new to science or the genus is in need of further study and revision.

I suggest that anyone who wishes to venture into the world of feather lice could refer to the supplements in the volumes of HANZAB and phone me on (08) 9370 1434.

References:

- Green, R.H. and Palma, R.L. 1991. A list of Lice (Insecta: Phthiraptera) from Tasmania. Records of the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston, Tasmania. 100, 1-43.
- Palma and S.C. Barker (1996). Phthiraptera. In Wells, A. (ed.) Zoological Catalogue of Australia, Psocoptera, Phthiraptera, Thysanoptera. 26: 81-247, 333-361 (App. I-IV), 373-396 (Index). CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne.
- Stranger, R.H. and Palma, R.L. 1998. Lice (Insecta: Phthiraptera) from some Australian birds. Records of the Western Australian Museum. 19, 169-186.

Robert H Stranger

NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined Birds Australia-WA Group between 1 November 1998 and 28 January 1999. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

Mr S Angus, Ms M Angus, Mrs H Beswick, Mr A R Brazowski, Mrs K Brown, Mr R Brown, Mr I Coombes, Mr D Crawley, Ms G Davidson, M/- T Davies, Mr E Donnelly, Mrs P Fleming, Ms S Garlick, Mr D Garlick, Mrs M Gell, Mr A Godfrey, Mr S Gunnel, Mrs A Hall, Mr G Houghton, Ms V Lord, Mr R Masters, Mrs G Montgomery, Mrs M J Myers, Mr E Myers, Mr P Pemberton, Mrs R Pickering, Mr G Pickering, Mrs M Robertson, Ms A Smith, Ms G Wilks, Mrs S Winnett.

Observatory Reports

BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

We made it! One week ago, we were looking upon the endless white sands of Kanidal Beach listening to a symphony of Major Mitchell Cockatoos 'singing' over the mallee. Today we look out upon Roebuck Bay and the Pindan woodland surrounding the Broome Bird Observatory full of many new birds and an array of unfamiliar calls. Being our first day we do not have much news to report and Chris, well he has been on a much-deserved holiday. If you have not yet heard, BBO will now have three full-time staff. We have taken on the role of

Atlas Excursions

If you are not yet atlassing, you now have the opportunity to take part and see how it happens. Special excursions are now being conducted in different parts of WA for the Atlas. These are around the Perth metropolitan area and its environs, and in regional areas. Long-range Atlas excursions are also on the calendar.

Excursions will provide you with an opportunity to do some wonderful birding and to meet other atlassers and have your atlassing questions answered while contributing to the Atlas. The Atlas Excursion Calendar is in your WA Atlas newsletter, *The West Australian Atlasser*. All atlassers and prospective atlassers are welcome.

Best wishes for 1999 to the Eyre and Broome Bird Observatory staff from the WA Group members

Facility Managers and Chris Hassell has altered his title and is staying on as the new Ornithological Manager ready to answer all your birding queries! We all look forward to the future challenges that lie before us during this very special time for BBO and hope many of you will find the time to drop by sometime soon. If you are planning to do any birdwatching, remember that BBO is '*one of the places to watch birds in Australia*', but you already knew that!

Speaking of birdwatching, vacancies still exist for the *Wave the Waders Goodbye* courses running 28 March-2 April and 12-17 April. Spaces are filling up fast so register your interest now. Witness shorebirds in full breeding plumage begin their long arduous journeys north.

Tracy Stolman and Alistair Dermer

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

We arrived at EBO (4500 km from home) two weeks ago to a warm welcome from Al and Tracy (now in Broome) and began to settle in. Finding where everything is, from screwdrivers to tracks is at first somewhat daunting but it's all falling rapidly into place. Serendipity had its way as we moved into the south room with its superb views of the looming dunes glowing a faint luminous pink in the sunrise of our first morning. What more can we say except that, as many before us, we fell for Eyre's timeless charm.

You have probably gathered that we, Alex (Alexis) and Rob (Robin) are the new wardens at Eyre. Rob first drove around Australia in 1969-70 after emigrating from England in 1968. Alex is a third generation Aussie whose great-grandfather was a camel driver working out of Bourke in NSW. 1987-88 saw us sailing our 10 m yacht north to Cairns and south to Coffs Harbour, opting to sail a friend's boat on Sydney Harbour for the Bicentennial celebrations. Trips by road in 1990 and 1992 to the Centre and Kakadu, along with a foray into Western Australia with Falcon Tours in 1994 stimulated our wanderlust. Voluntary redundancies from our positions with the Commonwealth Government in 1995 saw us in our trusty '77 Kingswood leave home to go to Brisbane (we lived just north of the city). Somehow we took a wrong turn at the end of our street and 22 500 km later we got to Brisbane

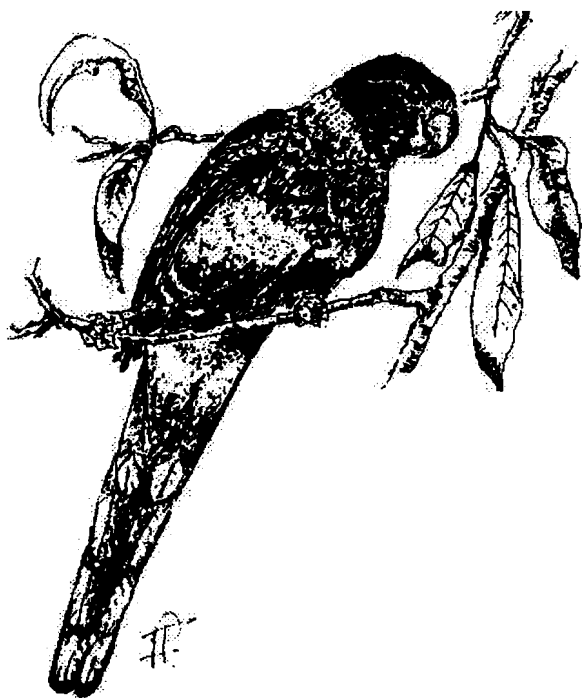
via Cooktown, the Gulf, Darwin, the Kimberley, Broome BO, Perth and points east. There followed a year doodling around Moreton Bay on the boat (she had been our home for ten years) followed by a year living in our house while Alex studied for her Graduate Certificate in Applied Science (Ornithology).

We have been involved in BOP Watch, Nest Record Scheme, wader counts for QWSG and a PhD student, the Atlas and Threatened Bird Network (Golden-shouldered Parrot, Albert's Lyrebird and Coxen's Fig-Parrot). Some of our records have also been included in a Guide to the Birds of Redcliffe, Caboolture and Pine Rivers. We hope to continue with these and other birding activities whilst at Eyre. Hopefully we will meet some of you while we are here. Any quEyrees don't hesitate to contact us on (08) 9039 3440.

When Eyre we meet.

Alex Bisgrove and Rob Stogdale

PS: We have rather strange senses of humour, but you will get used to it (hopefully).



A typical Australian Ringneck, one of the first birds seen on many excursions. An aberrant individual is described on page 15.
Sketched by Pam Free

Excursion Reports

LAKE JOONDALUP, 29 November 1998

A good crowd of 16 people turned up on a beautiful sunny and warm day for an interesting morning's birding.

It was an exciting start when two (Eastern) Long-billed Corellas were watched quietly feeding in the car park area. The walk through the bush was rewarding when Sacred Kingfishers, Striated Pardalotes, Shining Bronze-Cuckoos and Grey Butcherbirds were heard calling repeatedly. Two Whistling Kites were seen, one next to a nest. We were unsure if this was a young bird just out of the nest or not. Waterbirds were hard to see because of the strong morning light shining in our eyes. But it was good to see numbers of Great Crested Grebes and to hear Musk Ducks 'pinging'.

After morning tea some of the group went to the south end of the lake where it is more open and easier to see waterbirds. Nine extra species were added to the list, the most interesting being Pink-eared Ducks and two small rafts of Hoary-headed Grebes. A total of 58 species were seen compared with 49 in June 1998.

Tom Delaney

CAMPOUT AT LAKE WILGARUP, 11-13 December 1998

Only a fortnight to Christmas and Bill McRoberts thought he would be conducting this campout on his own! However, a small group of intrepid birders, ranging from as far afield as Albany, Margaret River, Manjimup, Bridgetown and Perth made this a very enjoyable and productive weekend. The venue was Eric and Yvonne Phillips' property, some 15 km north of Manjimup, at Lake Wilgarup. Unlike the last time this site was visited, the lake was full and the causeway leading to the campsite was under water. Plenty of water birds were seen roosting there as we drove in, including Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis, White-faced and White-necked Herons, Yellow-billed Spoonbill and Black-fronted Dotterel. Nearer to the campsite, Little Grassbirds, Clamorous Reed-Warblers and Restless Flycatchers were heard calling and just before dusk, a party of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos descended into nearby jarrah and marri trees.

Next morning, with the sun behind us, and an array of scopes at the ready, we scoured the lake for more water birds. Swans, pelicans, eight species of duck, two species of cormorants plus many Darters and several Great-crested Grebes, including some displaying were recorded in quick succession. Local woodland proved equally abundant highlighted by excellent views of White-winged Trillers, Rufous Treecreepers, Red-eared Firetails, White-breasted Robins and Varied Sittellas. A patient wait by the lake on the Sunday morning yielded a short glimpse of a Spotless Crake and two Southern Emu-wrens.

SECOND CORELLA COUNT

Saturday 17 April 1999

Starting 3:30 pm

The first count in June last year gathered useful data about the spread and numbers of feral corellas around Perth. We need to continue to track distribution and numbers that will, among other things, strengthen the case for control of these pest species.

See WABN 86, June 1998 for background information and identification hints and WABN 87, September 1998 for a report on the first corella survey.

If you know of a place that you regularly or often see corellas, or would be happy to be assigned to an area we already know about, please take part in an organised count at as many places as possible throughout the metropolitan area on 17 April. Counting begins at 3:30 pm and ends when it gets too dark to identify corellas.

We will identify the species of all corellas seen, and count the number of each species, at each site at approximately the same time on the same day.

If you would like to take part in this survey please contact John Blyth

by phone: work 9405 5100

home 9381 6293

by facs: 9306 1641

or email: johnbl@calm.wa.gov.au

In all, some 78 species were recorded by a total of eight observers in just under two days throughout the property (resulting in a very satisfying first Atlas Record sheet for yours truly, the local Atlas RO!).

A curiosity possibly worthy of mention was a young Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo seen facing up to a Western Gerygone as if begging for food, then apparently being chased off or followed by the latter.

Many thanks to Eric and Yvonne for allowing us access to their property and the camping area. Thanks also to Bill McRoberts for organising the campout and sharing his extensive knowledge with us.

Peter Taylor

LAKE YANGEBUP, 10 January 1999

Eighteen enthusiastic birders turned out on a beautiful crisp Sunday morning for the first organised walk for 1999, and it was well worth their effort. We only walked a few metres to an area where we could set up the telescopes to scan the lake and within minutes a Little Ringed Plover had been spotted. Several of the party had seen one at Bibra Lake at the end of last year but for many this was indeed a new 'spot'. (See article elsewhere in this issue.) After many long minutes of viewing through different 'scopes we sent a volunteer to "twinkle" the bird so we could check for wing markings to positively identify it.

We continued the walk round the lake and altogether we sighted 60 species of birds included four raptors and ten waterfowl.

It was a pleasant morning and an exciting start to birding in 1999.

Jan and Dave Crossley

BOORAGOON AND BLUE GUM LAKES, 14 January

Fourteen members attended this walk on a cool, slightly damp morning. We spent some time viewing the birdlife on Booragoon Lake from the boardwalk which gave everyone a chance to view at close quarters two particular species of birds: a pair of Great Crested Grebes which had built their nest close to the boardwalk; and several Nankeen Night Herons were either roosting amongst the nearby bushes or flying backwards and forwards across the lake. People were able to study the latter species at close quarters and note the differences between adult and immature plumages.

Several hundred Australian White Ibis usurped the remaining vegetation to the exclusion of most other species.

We then drove over to nearby Blue Gum Lake where several Australasian Grebes' nests were seen, one with an early brood. While here a Collared Sparrowhawk flew across the lake to the consternation of a flock of Rainbow Lorikeets which had been sheltering in the banksia woodland.

We sighted 40 species during the morning: 26 on Booragoon and 27 on Blue Gum.

Bryan Barrett

WOODMAN POINT, 17 January

Twenty-five members and guests attended the walk which commenced with a guided tour around the old explosives depot and into the quarantine area past the old grave sites. The whole area has become somewhat overgrown and tracks are beginning to disappear. The most interesting species seen were a pair of Inland Thornbills feeding a young Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, and a Brown Goshawk which flew from the ground into a dead tree where it was seen briefly by a number of the group. The whole area was fairly dry and not many birds were seen.

We then drove round to the parking area at the fishing groyne and, after refreshments, walked along the beach to the end of the Wapet Groyne. Only five species of waders

were seen, the most interesting of which were two Grey-tailed Tattlers. Caspian, Crested and Fairy Terns were also seen, but surprisingly there were no oystercatchers.

A total of 40 species was found during the morning: 26 in the reserve and 14 along the beach.

Bryan Barrett

WALPOLE-NORNALUP CAMPOUT, 23-26 January

Approximately 20 people, including visitors from Idaho (USA), Bridgetown and Manjimup, enjoyed four days of birding in the areas around Walpole, despite the generally overcast, drizzly conditions that persisted throughout.

Saturday was left free for people to set up camp as they arrived and to explore the local areas nearby.

On Sunday morning the group travelled to Mandalay, west of Walpole. The views were impressive but virtually nothing was seen on the beach due to the blustery conditions. However a few species were recorded in the more sheltered areas behind the dunes.

A visit to the Nuyts Wilderness car park on the way back to town was more profitable, and included sightings of Wedge-tailed Eagle, Western Rosella and Sacred Kingfisher.

**"... informative, witty
comments and
keyboard skills ..."**

During the afternoon many of the group enjoyed a three-hour boat trip on the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets. The informative, witty comments and keyboard skills of Garry, the tour operator, filled any dull moments between sightings. As well as the more common birds, Red-capped Plover, Caspian and Crested Tern, Osprey and a large flock of Black Swans were seen on the inlets. The hoped-for sighting of a White-bellied Sea-Eagle didn't eventuate though several people tried hard to turn a distant white branch into one. Most of the group also walked over the headland to Shelley Beach — a pleasant walk, but again few birds, though a Nankeen Kestrel was seen among the dunes.

Weather conditions were still dreary on the Monday but the group headed out to various points east of Walpole.

The first stop at Irwin Inlet was encouraging with 43 Black Swans feeding close to the shore, as well as Australian White Ibis, Yellow-billed Spoonbill and Swamp Harrier in flight. On nearby farmland Emus, Splendid Fairy-wrens, Richard's Pipits, White-fronted Chats, Elegant Parrots and a large flock of Straw-necked Ibis were seen.

A brief visit to the beach at Peaceful Bay provided little but Sooty Oystercatchers and Silver Gulls. However

an unbelievably tolerant Common Bronzewing on the path to the beach made up for it. The bronzewing continued to wander quietly along the margins of the path where everyone had excellent, very close views of it.

Along Ficifolia Road one or two stops were made, the most interesting sighting being a Square-tailed Kite twisting and turning just above the treetops as it hunted. A little further on, in Nut Road, the whole group was treated to a few exciting minutes when the pair of Square-tailed Kites appeared, this time much closer so that the barred wing markings and colouration were clearly visible. Three Brown Falcons (one a light phase) also appeared and unsettled everything else: numerous Tree Martins, Dusky Woodswallows, Elegant Parrots, Splendid Fairy-wrens and Richard's Pipits. Stubble Quail were also heard giving their 'pippy-wheat' call out in the paddock.

A walk along a short section of the Bibbulmun Track, where it crossed Nut Road, failed to produce the Red-eared Firetail that had been seen by one of the group earlier in the day. The striking orange-red blossoms of *Eucalyptus ficifolia* (Red-flowering Gum) in full flower made it a pleasant walk anyway and Western Spinebills and several other small species were seen.

The visit to Conspicuous Cliffs was vetoed due to the inclement weather and instead the group drove back to Nornalup where more sheltered areas along the river provided — finally! — a brief sighting of a Red-eared Firetail. Spotted Pardalotes were also seen.

Late in the afternoon some people were lucky enough to see Golden Whistlers and a Crested Shrike-tit on the Knoll, close to camp. In fact, the areas surrounding the camping site were a real bonus. The Knoll also provided, for some, an Osprey and its nest (not in use at present), White-browed Babblers building a nest, a pair of Tawny Frogmouths feeding a young one, and numerous Purple-crowned Lorikeets. A flock of about 20 Musk Ducks was seen on Walpole Inlet one evening, and most people had excellent views of Long-billed (Baudin's) Black-Cockatoos feeding on the blossoms of *Eucalyptus ficifolia* along the road into the camping area. A Southern Boobook flew through the camp one evening and Australian Pelicans were seen soaring overhead on several occasions. Several other species were easily seen in the trees and shrubs between the tents.

At some time during the campout most people also found time to visit the Tingle Walk and Mt Frankland. The latter especially provided a good variety of species as well as an interesting walk trail and great views for the energetic.

Purple-crowned Lorikeets and Tree Martins were particularly common in all areas and Western Rosellas and White-browed Scrub-wrens were also seen frequently.

All in all, it was a very pleasant campout, covering a variety of habitats. Thank you, Maggie, for your organisation and enthusiasm — and your insistence that the birds could still be found, despite the weather! We did manage to find over 80 species.

Pam Agar

Coming Events

Saturday 6 March — Half-day Excursion, Lake Gwelup

Meet at 8:30 am at the car park at the corner of Stoneham Street and Huntriss Road (north of Karrinyup Road).

An opportunity to see both waterbirds and bush birds.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Sunday 14 March — Half-day Excursion, Lake Coogee

Meet at 8:30 am on the southern side of Mayor Road, Munster (50 m west of Hamilton Road).

This is quite a diverse area, with over 100 species having been seen on the lake and in surrounding bushland. Nine species of raptors have been sighted.

Leaders: Jan and Dave Crossley

Wednesday 17 March — Mid-week Excursion, Yangebup Lake

Meet at 8:30 am on Yangebup Road, off Hammond Road, Yangebup. We'll be looking at waterbirds.

Leader: Tom Delaney

Saturday 20 March — Afternoon Excursion, Karakamia Sanctuary, Chidlow

Meet at 4:30 pm at the Visitors' Centre, Lot 201 Lilydale Road. From Perth, travel along Toodyay Road. About 3 km past Gidgegannup, turn right into Lilydale Road and continue for 6 km. The sanctuary is on the right-hand side, opposite a children's crossing sign, just before Clark Road.

"Karakamia" means home of the Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo. It has been set up as a sanctuary for native species indigenous to the Darling Range. Over 90 species of birds are on the list.

We'll have afternoon tea, then go birdwatching in the late afternoon (5 pm). On our return walk we'll be looking for native mammals. Please bring a torch. The walk will finish at approximately 7:30-8 pm.

Please phone the Birds Australia office to register numbers.

Leader: Andre Schmitz (Sanctuary Manager)

Monday 22 March Meeting — State Tennis Centre, Burswood, 8:00 pm

Dr Allan Burbidge, a member of the BAWAG Research Committee, is based at the Wildlife Research Centre at the Department of Conservation and Land Management and is one of Western Australia's foremost ornithologists. Allan will describe recent mapping of birds in the Carnarvon Basin and discuss how lessons learnt there can be applied to the BAWAG databases and the national atlas.

Saturday 27 March — Half-Day Excursion, Big Carine Lake

Meet at 8:00 am in the car park off Beach Road, Carine.

Eighty-plus species have been recorded here, including the three ibis, Buff-banded Rail, Freckled Duck, and several raptors. Don't forget your telescope.

Leader: Clive Nealon

Friday–Monday 2–5 April — Easter Campout, Merredin

Merredin is in the heart of the wheatbelt. There is a range of good birding sites in and around Merredin, including nature reserves, rocky outcrops, lakes, road verges, patches of remnant vegetation, farms, and revegetated areas. The area has over 100 species of birds, including the Mulga Parrot, Redthroat, White-eared Honeyeater, Southern Scrub-robin, and Malleefowl.

Our perch for the duration will be the Merredin Caravan Park, which is located at the far end of Great Eastern Highway, 1.5 km east of the post office. All types of accommodation are available. There is a swimming pool and very clean facilities. You will need to book early. Do so by phoning Sue or Paul Bartlett on (08) 9041 1535. Mention you're with the Birds Australia party. Please also phone the BA office if attending on (08) 9383 7749.

Leader: Maggie Cashman-Bailes (08) 9378 2457

Sunday 11 April — Half-day Excursion, Burswood Open Spaces

Meet at 8:30 am in the car park near the Tourist Centre, on Resort Drive. We'll be looking at the bird life which has returned to the public parks and gardens that occupy the site of the former Rivervale Dump.

Leader: Bill McRoberts

Thursday 15 April — Mid-week Walk, Big Carine Lake

Meet at 8:30 am in the car park off Beach Road, Carine. Eighty-plus species have been recorded here, including the three ibis, Buff-banded Rail, Freckled Duck, and several raptors. Don't forget your telescope.

Leader: Hank van Wees

Saturday 17 April — Second Corella count, starting 3:30 pm

See notice elsewhere in this issue.

Organiser: John Blyth

Sunday 18 April — Full-day Excursion, Lakes around Gingin

Meet at 9:00 am by the pub in the main street of Gingin. We'll then have a look at some lakes around the area.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Monday 19 April Meeting — State Tennis Centre, Burswood, 8:00 pm

Note: This meeting is a week earlier than usual because Anzac day is on Monday 26 April.

Kevin Coate will give a talk on the Birds of the little known Gardner and Denison Ranges.

Saturday–Monday 24–26 April — Anzac Day Long Weekend Campout at Hoffman's Mill

Hoffman's Mill is in the central Jarrah forest, about 120 km south of Perth, to the east of Yarloop. It is near the three sites into which Noisy Scrub-birds have recently been re-introduced and there is much lovely streamside habitat nearby. It is a new site for a BAWAG excursion.

The old mill site is suitable for bush camping. Toilets are available, but no other facilities, and you will need to bring your own water for drinking and cooking. This is a popular camping spot, so it would pay to arrive on the Friday evening or as early as possible on Saturday.

Hoffman's Mill is marked on map 46 of the current WA Travellers Atlas, at D5. To reach the site, travel south from Perth on the South-western Highway and turn left onto Logue Brook Dam Road, about five km south of Yarloop. Continue on until the road runs into Clark Rd which runs directly to Hoffman's Mill. Once there look for RAOU signs to the BAWAG camp.

Leaders: John Blyth & Clive Napier

Saturday 1 May — Full-day Excursion, Lowlands Estate, Serpentine

The owner, Miss Midge Richardson, has allowed us access to her property. Lowlands is approximately 1 hour from Perth. Turn off Thomas Road, Oakford, into Kargotich Road, then travel south for 14 km to the T-junction with Lowlands Road (a No Through Road). Turn right — the entrance to the property is approximately 3 km further on. Meet here at 9:00 am. As this is a private property, it's important that you arrive at the appointed time.

Birds to be seen include the Golden Whistler (not commonly seen on the coastal plain), and several species of honeyeater. The current bird list was compiled in 1993 and has 48 species recorded.

Leader: Allan Burbidge or Bryan Barrett

Sunday 9 May — Half-day Excursion, Webb's Lease, Jarrahdale

Meet at 9:00 am in the car park. Travel from Armadale on the South-west Highway. Turn left into Jarrahdale Road. Go through Jarrahdale. After approximately 5.5 km, turn right into Acacia Road (the next right turn past Blue Rock Road). Keep to the left to get to the car park.

This is a new area, where Red-eared Firetails, White-breasted Robins, and Red-winged Fairy-wrens are regularly seen.

Leader: Bill McRoberts

Thursday 13 May — Mid-week Walk, Wungong Gorge, Bedfordale

Meet at 8:30 am at the first car park for Wungong Dam, at the end of Admiral Road (off Albany Highway), Bedfordale.

This is an excellent site for Red-eared Firetails and White-breasted Robins. Ninety-two species have been seen

at this site. Wedge-tailed Eagles are again being sighted — since at least one bird was shot and fire destroyed their nest.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Saturday 15 May — Half-day Excursion, Kent Street Weir, Wilson

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

Leader: Richard King

Sunday 23 May — Half-day Excursion, Bickley Brook

Meet at 8:30 am at the turning circle, next to the children's camp, at the Reservoir on the Maddington/Hardinge Road.

We have a good chance of seeing emu-wrens, Red-browed Firetails, plus all our favourite bush birds.

Leader: Les Harris

Monday 24 May Meeting — State Tennis Centre, Burswood, 8:00 pm

Projects like the Atlas highlight the problems of identifying species in some groups of birds. A panel of experienced birders will present an interactive session on 'Identifying tricky birds'. The birds discussed will be the three corellas, the two white-tailed black cockatoos, the three red-shouldered fairy-wrens, the three brown-rumped thornbills found in the arid zone, and the three corvids.

Sunday 30 May — Full-day Excursion, Flynn Road

Meet at 9:00 am on the corner of Flynn Road and Great Eastern Highway, about one kilometre on the Perth-side of "The Lakes" turnoff, ie, the York Road turnoff.

We'll look at several areas of Wandoo woodland, where three species of robin are usually seen.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Saturday–Monday 5–7 June — Campout, Mount Gibson Station

The turnoff to Mt Gibson Station is 74 km north-east of Wubin along the Great Northern Highway, heading for Payne's Find. The homestead is 27 km from the main road, heading due east from the highway. Please close gates that are shut and follow the signs. The road into the station is a good graded road. (Fill up your petrol tank at Wubin.)

There is a bush camp 2 km from the homestead with basic toilets and a bucket shower. A shearing shed is also available.

In 1997, five partners bought the station with the aim of conservation and land-care. Some work has already

1999 Pelagic Trips

Further pelagic trips are being planned for 1999. The dates have not been finalised yet, but they are planned for late May, early July and late August. The expected cost is \$65 for a full day (7 am to 3:30 to 4 pm).

For details contact Frank O'Connor
on (08) 9386 5694
or email: foconnor@inet.net.au

been carried out to document the birds of the area, which should be similar to those seen at nearby Ninghan Station last year.

Please phone the Birds Australia office to register numbers and obtain further details.

Leader: Clive Napier

**Saturday 12 June — Half-day Excursion,
The Spectacles, Kwinana**

Meet in the main car park on McLaughlan Road at 8:30 am. Proceed along the Kwinana Freeway to the Anketell crossroad, some 30 km south of Perth. Turn right into Anketell Road, travel about 2 km, then turn left into McLaughlan Road. Over 100 species of birds have been sighted.

It's a nice place for lunch so bring some!

Leader: Bill McRoberts

**Wednesday 16 June — Mid-week Walk,
Burswood Open Spaces**

Meet at 9:00 am in the car park near the Tourist Centre, on Resort Drive. We'll be looking at the bird life which has returned to the public parks and gardens that occupy the site of the former Rivervale Dump.

Leader: Mary Vaughan

**Sunday 20 June — Half-day Excursion,
Star Swamp, North Beach**

Meet at 8.30 am at the Hope Street entrance. Star Swamp has Tuart woodland, mixed-Banksia woodland, and heath.

Leader: Dee Smith

**Sunday 27 June — Half-day Excursion,
Herdsman Lake**

Meet at 8:30 am at the car park at the tennis courts, off Herdsman Parade, near the corner of Jon Sanders Drive (E6 on Map 59, *Streetsmart* Perth 1996 Street Directory).

This is a long half-day walk, and lunch back at the cars will be late, so bring nibblies and water to tide yourself over. You should be rewarded by a good mix of waterbirds and bushbirds.

Leaders: John and Judy Blyth

**Monday 28 June Meeting — State Tennis Centre,
Burswood, 8:00 pm**

John Blyth, a co-editor of *WA Bird Notes* and based at CALM's Threatened Species and Communities Unit at Woodvale, will speak on 'Rare and Threatened Birds of WA'. John and Allan Burbidge are putting the finishing touches to a new 'Bush Book' of the same title. John will discuss which birds are threatened, the reasons for that status, actions in train to recover them and the role that BAWAG is increasingly playing in recovery efforts.

**Monday 26 July Meeting — State Tennis Centre,
Burswood, 8:00 pm**
Speaker to be advised.

**Monday 23 August Meeting — State Tennis Centre,
Burswood, 8:00 pm**
Speaker to be advised.

**Monday 20 September Meeting — State Tennis
Centre, Burswood, 8:00 pm**

Note: 3rd Monday due to the public holiday on the following Monday.

Robyn Phillimore of CALM and doing an MSc at Edith Cowan University, will be speaking on her area of research which is egrets in general including those at the Perth Zoo.

**Monday 25 October Meeting — State Tennis Centre,
Burswood, 8:00 pm**
Speaker to be advised.

**Monday 22 November Meeting — State Tennis Centre,
Burswood, 8:00 pm**
Speaker to be advised.

**Latest Editions
for sale at
Perry House Bookshop
(special members' prices)**

Books

- ♦ *Birds of Prey*
by Stephen Debus \$20.00
- ♦ *Handbook of Western Australian Birds*
vol I, by Storr & Johnstone \$100.00
- ♦ *Guide to the Wildflowers of South
Western Australia*
by Simon Nevill \$20.00

plus field guides

Videos

- ♦ *Birds of Broome — Endless Summer*
\$40.00
- ♦ *Wilderness Regained*
— Houtman Abrolhos \$30.00

For loan

- ♦ Bird Calls (set of 11)
- ♦ John Young's video on owls:
Wings of Silence

THREE DESERTS PRINCESS PARROT EXPEDITION 1999

Sun 15 August – Sat 11 September

An expedition to document distribution and breeding of the rare Princess Parrot in the Gibson Desert Region.

THREE PLACES STILL AVAILABLE!

This will be an unusual opportunity to venture into the most remote regions of WA. Come and join the search for the rare Princess Parrot and experience arid-zone birding at its best! We are over-subscribed for the tag-along places, but we still have three vacancies for passengers in the hire vehicles.

The cost for the 28-day (Perth to Perth approximately 5000 km) trip for a paying passenger will be \$2,960; this works out to \$105.70 per day.

Comparing this to similar ventures such as Landscape and those offered by professional tour operators, you will find this very good value indeed.

Because this is an expedition and not a "twitch-a-tour", costs have been kept to a minimum, but comfort and catering will be of good standard.

We'll be looking in earnest for the Princess Parrot. Three major 'base camps' have been planned — the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve, Tobin Lake, and Rudall River National Park, each for several days. While here, we'll set off in parties to look for the Princess Parrot, and conduct general bird surveys for the new Atlas of Australian Birds.

We request that participants be in good health; please check with your doctor if in any doubt, as this will be an arduous journey in an isolated environment.

For insurance purposes, all members of the expedition need to be financial members of Birds Australia. We welcome participations from members of all ages; however, bear in mind that the Birds Australia insurance policy will only cover those participants aged from 16 to 69.

Please ring (08) 9459 1971 to reserve a place, whereupon a booking form will be sent to you.

*Bill and Karen McRoberts
Trip Organisers*

Crossword Answers No 16

ACROSS

1 high, 3 spot, 5 gulls, 8 striations, 11 edge, 12 chevrons, 14 mesh, 15 silver, 17 distal, 18 morph, 19 Ord, 23 year, 24 gregarious, 27 eagle, 28 irruption.

DOWN

1 havoc, 2 hat, 4 plains, 6 length, 7 lobe, 8 speculum, 9 rare, 10 sedentary, 13 muddy, 15 spangled, 16 report, 20 debris, 21 prions, 22 court, 25 gale, 26 spur.



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