

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of
Birds Australia Western Australia Inc
(a division of Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union)

No 95 September 2000

AFTER THE 'WET'

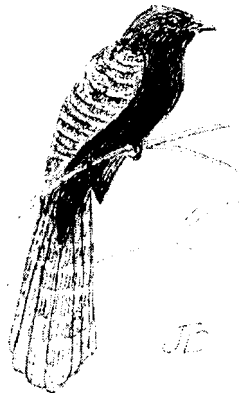
In late June and early July this year our group walked in the north Kimberley from the Mitchell Plateau to the Hunter River. We climbed Donkins Hill and returned to the airstrip via the Mitchell Falls. A total of 13 days. En route we performed daily atlassing surveys.

The region showed many signs of the two major cyclones that passed over the area in the late summer and autumn. Along the Mitchell River many of the pandanus palms had been stripped of their leaves or uprooted. In one of our planned camping sites a whole grove of mature paperbark trees and an associated sand bar had just disappeared. The flood level in some of the gorges had reached over 15 m, whilst on the open flat grasslands it was still over 2 m. Wind damage in the more westerly areas was evident by the uprooting of up to fifty percent of the trees, all laid out in parallel rows. Most other trees showed damage to their foliage, though regrowth was well underway. The late heavy rains have maintained a high level of runoff late into the dry season, so that most streams were still running and groundwater was plentiful. The grasslands were still very boggy with a resultant lush growth that made progress rather difficult.

On our first afternoon we travelled only a few kilometres from the airstrip to our first campsite alongside a small rapidly flowing creek. We were delighted to be greeted by an Azure Kingfisher absolutely glowing in the late afternoon sunlight. Whilst we were happily setting up camp we became aware of a family of wrens in the adjacent grass. We soon spotted the male, a Red-backed Fairy-wren, only

too willing to flaunt his magnificent colouring. The wrens and the kingfisher remained around the camp until we left the next morning. As we broke camp a male Mistletoebird partook of his breakfast a few metres above our heads. Our trek was off to a most auspicious flying start.

Flycatchers and fantails were to become frequent visitors to our camps throughout the trip. We had a number of close encounters with Northern Fantails and were very pleased to see that they could be matched to the illustrations in our field guide. We had previously found them difficult to determine with distant observations. Another regular was the Leaden Flycatcher, mainly males, with only one female being seen during the entire trip. Willie Wagtails and Restless Flycatchers were common, often attending our rest breaks. Conversely we saw only one Shining Flycatcher, a female, skulking in the pandanus like a brown and white mouse. Other birds common throughout the region included the Striated Pardalote, Pied Butcherbirds and both Little and Silver-crowned Friarbirds. The song of the Brown Honeyeater could be heard along all the creeks and rivers.



Pheasant Coucals are conspicuous birds of the vast grasslands and savannahs of northern Australia.

Drawing: Judy Blyth

In the grasslands we saw a Bustard with its head barely visible over the lush grass. In a more wooded part, with shorter grasses, we flushed out a pair of Bush Stone-curlews.

Also in the shorter grass we saw several groups of Brown Quail, often sitting until we were only a metre away from them. On the return part of the trip we travelled through an area of very long grasses inhabited by Golden-headed Cisticolas, many of which were juveniles. Their presence

was announced by their typical calls. Nankeen Night Herons were common along the larger streams; again there were many juveniles.

At one waterside campsite we were entertained by a very obliging warbler which we examined and debated for about 15 minutes before deciding that it was a young Dusky Warbler. Only a few minutes after it had gone it was replaced by a White-throated Warbler. We did not see any other warblers during the whole trip.

Once we left the plateau proper we started to encounter the finches. The commonest were the Crimson Finches, regularly seen in the pandanus along the watercourses. We were watching one family early in the morning, preening themselves in the day's first rays from the sun, when they erupted into a frantic commotion. A Brown Goshawk had silently appeared in the tree a few metres above them and was watching them with decidedly hungry yellow eyes. The finches all retired into the inner parts of the pandanus until the hawk flew away. Double-barred Finches were common locally but usually well hidden. We shared one lunch break with a pair that were busy building their nest in spite of our presence.

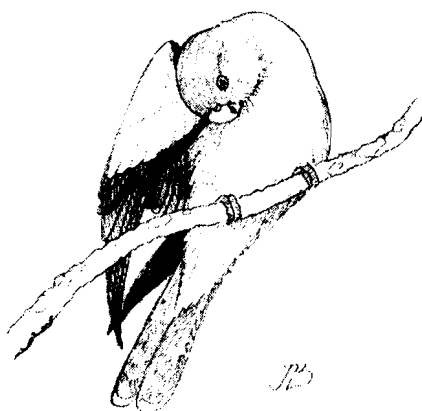
Banded Honeyeaters were common where there were tall paperbark or eucalypt trees. Bar-breasted Honeyeaters were widespread but never common and were usually close to creeks. In the denser thickets we saw occasional White-gaped Honeyeaters.

Small groups and pairs of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos were in most areas, with occasional sightings of Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Red-winged Parrots. We saw one group of about six to eight Northern Rosellas in light woodland.

Other interesting sightings included a Yellow Oriole and Spangled Drongo in very dense *Ficus* thickets. A young Wedge-tailed Eagle remained in a small dead tree and allowed itself to be examined before floating gracefully away. Similarly we were ignored by a pair of Brolgas as we worked our way around the boggy grassland that they had claimed. We encountered a number of Pheasant Coucals, and on one occasion we saw three of them on the ground, then climbing skilfully up through the undergrowth and into the trees before launching themselves into the air and crashing into the adjacent trees.

In the Hunter River area we regularly saw White-quilled Rock-Pigeons. On the day that we climbed Donkins Hill we were resting at a small waterfall on our ascent when one landed in the middle of the group. It soon realised its error and flew off. This was the only bird we saw in full during the whole period we were on the hill. We had a glimpse of only one other head in the rocks in over six hours.

The prize sighting occurred on the ninth day when we were climbing up a steep sandstone watercourse



The Red-winged Parrot has its stronghold in the tropical north of Australia, but in eastern Australia it is seen as far south as the Riverina in NSW.
Drawing: Judy Blyth

overgrown with grass and spinifex, when we were suddenly in the middle of a family of Black Grasswrens. They were there for only a minute or so, but a most memorable time it was.

After 13 days we arrived back at the Mitchell Plateau airstrip to await our flights back to Perth. Tired and happy we had achieved all our trip's goals, collected 13 atlassing reports and seen over 70 species of mainly grassland and woodland birds.

**Bob Fergie, Jim Langford,
Margaret Langford, Austen
Langford, Judy Bonomelli,
Sue Vetten, Bob de la Motte**

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.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Emu – 2, 2/7/00, Albany Hwy, 8 km N of Bannister (Wandering) – GM (rarely seen in this area nowadays)

Soft-plumaged Petrel - 45 (including flock of 35 - largest flock recorded for SW WA), 18/6/2000, Hillarys Pelagic Trip – FO *et al.*

Wandering Albatross – 5, 6/00, West End, Rottnest – CD

Black-browed Albatross - 5, 14/5/2000, Hillarys Pelagic Trip – FO *et al.* * 9, 18/6/2000, Hillarys Pelagic Trip – FO *et al.*

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 20, 14/5/2000, Hillarys Pelagic Trip - FO *et al.* * 5+, 8/7/2000, Bunker Bay near Dunsborough (Busselton) - FO (flying past about 300 to 500 metres off shore from the rocky point)

White-necked Heron - 32, 23/12/99, Stirling Road swamp, Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ (high count for SW WA)

Australian White Ibis - 320, 13/10/99, in swamp just S of Hamel, SW Highway (Waroona) - DJ (possibly the highest count ever for SW WA)

Straw-necked Ibis - nests with young, 20/11/99, The Spectacles (Kwinana) - DJ

Great Skua - 17, 18/6/2000, Hillarys Pelagic Trip - FO *et al.*

Short-billed Black-Cockatoo - 500-600, 16/5/00, near junction Peppermint Grove Road and Old Coast Road (W of Waroona) (Waroona) - BN, JR

Rainbow Lorikeet - 1+, 3/00, S of Yangebup Lake (Cockburn) - SM * 3, 11/3/00, W side of Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ (this species is still expanding in numbers and range)

Regent Parrot - 48 in flock, 17/7/00, W side of Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

Elegant Parrot - 95, 13/3/00, Piara Nature Reserve, Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ (high number for the Swan Coastal Plain)

Southern Emu-wren - 2, 25/9/99, Mealup Point, Harvey Estuary (Murray) - DJ

Yellow-throated Miner - 50, 12/6/00, Anstey Road, Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ (unusually high number for this area)

Hooded Robin - 2 (a pair), 19/7/99, Anketell Road, Oakford (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) - DJ * 1, 14/1/00, Modong Nature Reserve, Oakford (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) - DJ (uncommon on the Swan Coastal Plain)

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

Black-breasted Buzzard - 1, 14/7/00, near Coolcalalaya homestead (Northampton) - AR, SR

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo - 12, 14/7/00, near Yallalong homestead (Murchison) AR, SR.

KIMBERLEY

Radjah Shelduck - 1, 20/7/00, Kidney Bean Claypan (Broome) - BBO (2nd record for Broome)

Pied Heron - 1, 25/6/00, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (unusual in Broome area)

Osprey - 1, 7/7/2000, near Argyle Diamond Alluvial Tailings Dam (This is the first record on the lease) (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - FO

Red-backed Button-quail - 8, 6/8/00, caught and banded on the Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (rarely recorded in the Broome area; southern-most record for WA)

Common Redshank - 5, 11/7/00, Crab Creek (Broome) - BBO (apparently over-wintering)

Grass Owl - 1, 29/7/00, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater - 1, 2/7/00, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO (feeding on a *Hakea* above

the shadehouse; first record for Broome and northernmost record for WA)

Hooded Robin - 3, 8/8/00, Broome area (Broome) - BBO

Crested Shrike-tit - 2, 27/6/00, Miner's Pool, Drysdale River (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - DB, MG, RC (only rarely recorded in northern Australia) (see note elsewhere in this issue)

Welcome Swallow - 1, 21/6/00, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) - BBO

OBSERVERS

AR = Allan Rose

GM = Greg Marston

BBO = Broome Bird Observatory

JR = Julie Raines

BN = Brenda Newbey

MG = Mike Griffiths

CD = Colin Davis

RC = Rick Curtis

DB = Di Beckingham

SM = Shapelle McNee

DJ = David James

SR = Sandy Rose

FO = Frank O'Connor

BIRDS AUSTRALIA RARITIES COMMITTEE (BARC)

BARC, chaired by Tony Palliser, assesses reports of national rarities. In the last few months, the following Western Australian cases have been accepted, and are listed below for the information of local members. The format is case number, common name, scientific name, location, date.

240 Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* Broome, WA, 23/1/98

Book Review

THE DIRECTORY OF AUSTRALIAN BIRDS. PASSERINES. By R. Schodde and I.J. Mason. (CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Vic, 1999). \$180.00 rrp.

This enormous, and enormously detailed, work is the first of a planned three volume set. The second volume will cover the non-passerines and the third will address the biogeography and evolution of Australian birds. The intention of the authors is to assemble as much as possible of the information available to be able to clarify the level of diversity within each genus of passerine bird resident in or regularly visiting Australia.

The book is described as "A Taxonomic and Zoogeographic Atlas of the Biodiversity of Birds in Australia and its Territories". It is not a book for use in the field - in A4 format, 851 pages (including a useful glossary, detailed reference lists and two indexes) and

weighing almost 3 kg, it is a reference book for libraries and research workers. It is an important document that will be of interest to many birdwatchers.

The current biodiversity unit in use for Australian birds is the species and sometimes, as in the current Action Plan for Australian Birds, the subspecies. The most radical difference between the *Directory* and other treatments of Australian birds is the use of the term 'ultrataxon'. Schodde and Mason go into some detail describing different species concepts and their application, and defining 'ultrataxa' and benefits of the concept. In effect, ultrataxa are equivalent to subspecies, except that in the case of species with little or no discernible variation, the species itself is an ultrataxon. Schodde and Mason argue that ultrataxa are the entities we should be considering in any appraisal of conservation efforts.

The bulk of the book consists of a listing of the ultrataxa of Australian passerines, each of which is mapped. At the beginning of each family is a summary of the characteristics of that family. Within each species treatment, broad habitat types are coded for each ultrataxon. Where a species consists of more than one ultrataxon, the differences between constituent ultrataxa are described. Taxonomic circumscription is noted and explanations given for the authors' taxonomic decisions. These are often quite interesting, providing a description of variation and relationships within the group of populations being discussed. The treatment for each species ranges from one to several pages, including a map for each species at the same scale as that in the RAOU *Atlas of Australian Birds*.

A number of subspecies are resurrected or newly described in the volume, but at the species level, there are three examples of particular interest to Western Australians. First, the northern and south-western populations (subspecies) of the Crested Shrike-tit are treated as separate species (Northern Shrike-tit and Western Shrike-tit). Second, the Western Whipbird is split into two species – one at Two Peoples Bay and Manypeaks (Western Whipbird) and the other in the southern wheatbelt and south-eastern Australia (Mallee Whipbird). Interestingly, there are few morphological differences between these whipbird populations and recently obtained genetic evidence (not available at the time the *Directory* was written) suggest that these populations are not from different species and are possibly all within one subspecies. Future workers are therefore not likely to follow the *Directory* in this regard. Third, the Rufous Fieldwren is split into two species – the Rufous Fieldwren of the Carnarvon coast, East Pilbara, Nullarbor and South Australia and north-west Victoria, and the Western Fieldwren in the south-west of Western Australia. Although Schodde and Mason give reasons for this decision, it is hard to see how it can be justified – they appear to have named different points on a cline, in much the same way as may have happened in the whipbird example. Nevertheless, Schodde and Mason may be correct in their interpretation of variation in fieldwrens and in their subspecific divisions of other species – a likely (and desirable) consequence of their suggestions is that

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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

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field observers and geneticists alike will be encouraged to look more closely at variation in these birds and bring us to a better understanding of their origins, relationships and conservation priorities.

A disappointing aspect of the volume is the detail in the maps. The introduction states that these are based on the *Atlas of Australian Birds*, updated where appropriate. However, there are many discrepancies with respect to the *Atlas* and authoritative sources such as Glen Storr's regional lists. For example, the *Atlas* and other published sources of information show that Brown-headed Honeyeaters normally occur to the base of Shark Bay, yet the *Directory* shows them as falling well short of here. A few other examples will illustrate the point: Thick-billed Grasswrens are shown on Bernier and Dorre (from where there are no records) but not on Dirk Hartog (where they once occurred), Slender-billed Thornbill is shown as having an extensive inland distribution but not occurring anywhere near Shark Bay (where they are well known as occurring on Edel Land and the coast south of Carnarvon), Purple-gaped Honeyeater is shown as not occurring east of Cape Arid, even though it has been known for over a decade as being at Eyre. A number of other examples could be cited. Most are where ranges are more extensive than shown, but occasionally the reverse is the case – for example, we know of no evidence that Gilbert's Whistler ever occurred near the coast between Perth and Geraldton, as shown in the map in the *Directory*. These errors are minor relative to the thrust of the book, but nevertheless are numerous, and detract from what is otherwise a very authoritative volume.

This volume reminds us that conservation of biological diversity must, to be truly effective, take place at three levels: ecosystems, species and genes. To a very large extent, the conservation of birds has traditionally concentrated at the species level. Taken to extremes this approach could still allow a very significant erosion of avian diversity in Australia. Further, the information in this book potentially allows conservation planners to decide at what level they want to conserve populations of the various species and which are the most important populations to conserve.

The size and cost of this book will put it beyond the reach of most bird watchers, but it is one that many would find interesting and useful as a reference document concerning the taxonomy and relationships of Australian birds. For the more ambitious, extending your identification skills to the ultrataxon level will add a challenging new dimension to birdwatching. It can also add further to the understanding of the detailed distribution of the various subunits of diversity within many widespread species.

Allan Burbidge and John Blyth

GPS Units

Since the introduction of the GST, GPS units have actually gone **down** in price! Birds Australia WA is now offering the Pioneer 300 GPS, together with the bonus car adapter AND carry pouch for **only \$280**. This price includes GST. Available from Perry House.

Birds Australia WA Inc reports

THE COMMITTEE

The committee continues to meet on the third Wednesday of each month at Perry House. The committee is charged with conducting the activities of the group on behalf of its members and we welcome any items that you feel should be considered by the committee for action.

Incorporation

In the June edition of Bird Notes I reported that we had finally achieved Incorporation. This after a long and at times arduous process, and I would like to again register my thanks to all of the people who helped us to overcome the obstacles that were encountered along the way.

In most respects our incorporation should be transparent to our membership. Members will still be members of Birds Australia nationally, and by virtue of living in Western Australia, will be members of BAWA Inc. There should be no difference at all in the services offered to members in WA. This does not mean that incorporation will not bring benefits to the group. One of the more important benefits, and one that helped spur on the committee in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems, is the ability to apply for larger grants from state bodies. In the past we have been restricted to comparatively small sums because we were not incorporated. We now look forward to successful applications for grants that may support significantly larger projects.

Birds Australia AGM 2001

The council of Birds Australia has agreed that the Annual General Meeting of the national body should be held in Western Australia. This will be the first time that the AGM of the national body has been held in WA, and we should all be keen to demonstrate that the group is a significant and important part of Birds Australia.

The AGM will be held on Saturday 27 May, Members Day. While the AGM itself will last for perhaps, an hour, we intend to stage a day of presentations that will showcase the work being carried out by the group in WA.

On Friday 26 May a Member's Forum will be held. The Member's Forum will afford the opportunity for BA members to meet the principals of Special Interest Groups, Observatories, and Regional Groups, as well as members of council, and to discuss issues of common interest.

The council will hold a council meeting on Sunday 28 May, bringing the weekend's official business to a close.

However, we hope to be able to stage a special campout that will allow those who have travelled to Perth from the eastern states to gain an appreciation of the birds of the west.

If anybody has suggestions that they consider will enhance the weekend please contact any committee member, or me. I am keen to ensure that we put on a weekend for which it will be worth travelling from the east.

Project Status

The Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo project has now commenced and Tamra Chapman and Cheryl Gole are the joint project officers. Cheryl is also working with Allan Burbidge on the Survey of salt-affected areas of the WA Wheatbelt, a project that will tie in closely with the national Atlas project.

The Hooded Plover project is continuing as a joint project of BAWA and the Threatened Species Network under a Clean Seas grant from the Natural Heritage Trust with winter and summer surveys planned.

The latest report from the Ground Parrot studies has been compiled by Shapelle Macnee and submitted to the sponsor.

Committee Activity

Having already said that the committee is charged with conducting the activities of the group on behalf of its members, I feel I need to highlight some of the activities carried out over the last quarter, and to point out that we do need the continuing support of our members to carry out the increasing number of activities.

The Perry House office layout has been changed to provide a more presentable appearance to visitors and a better environment for the volunteers who work in the office. Comments received from both volunteers and visitors have been positive and Liz Walker and Sue Mather are to be congratulated for their efforts with the office and the library.

Mary Vaughan has willingly and cheerfully accepted the challenge provided by the Federal government in the shape of GST, which has added considerably to her workload. The advent of GST also required that we upgrade our computer software to cater for the changes.

By the time this issue of Bird Notes reaches you, Wes Bancroft will have provided two bird identification sessions to Westralian Airports Corporation staff who have responsibility for conducting bird counts three times each week in the Perth airport precincts. The corporation needs to monitor bird numbers in order to develop strategies to minimise the danger of bird strikes on aircraft using the airport.

Our secretary, Dot Kingston, has resigned from the position for family reasons. I must thank Dot here for the work she has done while secretary, and I hope that she will be able to continue her involvement with the group in the future.

Volunteers Required

In addition to the points just made, the group's more visible and long-standing events, such as

- the birding excursions that are arranged
 - the monthly meetings that are organised
 - the staffing of our office
- continue to require the commitment of a number of selfless volunteers.

Two of our regular office volunteers have also had to withdraw from the roster. Thank you Tony Bennett and Eggy Boggs for your help in the past, and again I hope that you will be able to continue your association with BAWA into the future.

The continuing vitality of BAWA is dependent on volunteers, and on the sales of books, cards, and other items that provide funding to cover our operating costs. We will again be able, this year, to sell our cards through the Kings Park Board Wildflower Festival, and Christmas cards through the Combined Charities Card Shop.

These are all the sorts of events that we have become accustomed to over the past few years. However, we are receiving increasing requests to contribute to community issues and discussions concerning the conservation and protection of birds and their habitats around the metropolitan area. We should welcome these requests, because they indicate that BAWA is seen as an organisation that can help, and whose opinions are respected. To maintain and enhance this perception we must respond positively to these requests.

In order to do this, we need help. We need help from more of our members. The committee cannot respond to all of the requests received. We desperately need members to assist in responding to community concerns. Without our active involvement we may lose the very thing that we feel so strongly about — our bird life.

In spite of the recent study commissioned by Birds Australia that discovered that one in five species of Australian birds is threatened with extinction, we find that, in some parts of Australia, land clearance continues unabated. Within the Perth metropolitan region two particular issues are currently causing considerable debate.

In Melville the city council is proposing to divide the Flora and Fauna reserve on the bank of the Swan River which stretches from Alfred Cove and along the Attadale reserve towards Point Walter in two. Between the two parts will be a 175-metre stretch of beach designated as a dog exercise area. How will it be possible to ensure the dogs swim between the flags? How much more disturbance can the waders that use the area bear before they disappear from the river altogether? How long will it be before every council receives demands from its dog owner ratepayers for similar facilities on other waterbird habitats?

In Carine, the extension to the Reid Highway is going ahead this year. The highway will encroach on the southern end of Big Carine swamp; the road's two-metre high embankment will come within five metres of the paperbarks that line the swamp.

Each new development seems to remove more valuable habitat. The justification seems always to be that only a small percentage of the total area is being lost. Small percentages however, when added together, equate to large reductions in



Bower of Great Bowerbird
Bungle Bungles, June 2000
Photo: Molly Angus

useful habitats capable of supporting our dwindling metropolitan bird populations.

All of these requirements, none too big individually, mount up to a sizeable task. You can make a difference. You can.

There are people who can help you get started, and provide you with the sort of advice and encouragement that you need to take on some of these tasks. BAWA needs you take on one of these, and other, tasks. More importantly, the birds need us to make our presence known.

Please take some time to consider what I've said, and see if you could spare some of your time to helping with some of the tasks outlined. There is no minimum requirement specified. Any assistance you can offer will be valuable to the group, and I'm sure that you will find it personally rewarding. If you have any questions, please contact me, or leave a message at the office.

Clive Nealon
BAWA Chairman

HOODED PLOVER PROJECT

Survey 16 to 30 September

Your help is requested.

The success of past surveys by Birds Australia Western Australia has highlighted the need for pro-active management of beaches for Hooded Plover conservation.

As a result of this, the current project has been designed and funded to instigate on-ground management of Hooded Plovers in four key areas in Western Australia. An important part of the project is more survey to improve knowledge of distribution and breeding. Better knowledge should lead to better management.

All recipients of *WA Bird Notes* from Shark Bay southwards should have received a Hooded Plover observation form. The survey is running from 16 to 30 September inclusive. A second survey will be in February next year.

Priorities are (ambitiously):

1. a thorough coverage of the beaches and inlets from Cape Naturaliste to Esperance,
2. coverage of lakes in the target regions of Esperance and Yalgorup,
3. more breeding records and
4. coverage of any other salt lakes (particularly coastal ones) from Shark Bay southwards.

By thoroughly covering the area between Cape Naturaliste and Esperance during this study, we may be able to estimate the residential population in that important area.

Breeding records are scarce although Hooded Plovers nest out in the open and take about 28 days to hatch their eggs. It is especially hoped that the September survey will yield some additional breeding records. Although they don't have a clearly defined breeding season, there have been records of eggs or runners on the south and the lower west coast and inland in September. To determine if Hooded Plovers have a nest or downy young often takes extra time and patience. An adult Hooded Plover on its own may indicate another on a nest; a broken wing display while not enough to record breeding, is a good clue that your patience may be rewarded.

It is preferable to observe the birds from a distance and if checking a nest to do so very quickly.

How you can help

Use your observation form — preferably during the survey period 16 to 30 September. If you know in advance where you would like to survey, or would like some help in selecting a location, please advise Phyllis Bentley or Brenda Newbey. We wish to accomplish good coverage, and avoid duplication of effort. Survey sites will be along the coast from Cape Naturaliste to Esperance and any salt lake from Shark Bay southwards.

Phyllis Bentley Phone: 9384 0127

Brenda Newbey Phone: 9337 5673

Either can be contacted by mail, fax or email through the Perry House office.



Beach at Bremer Bay in June. Two Hooded Plovers were seen beside lagoon on RH-side. They flew across to the beach. They are sharing the area with 4WDs and dogs.

Photo: Brenda Newbey

Please note that negative records (where you have searched a site but not found Hooded Plovers), although not exciting, are very valuable.

Don't waste your form. If you can't do a survey in September, do use the form before the year ends. All information will form a part of the slowly emerging Hooded Plover picture.

Past Surveys

September has in the past proved a difficult time for finding Hooded Plovers. Typically they seem to be widely dispersed at this time of the year with a higher proportion of those found being inland than in summer

and autumn. It has been estimated that there could be about 4000 Hooded Plovers in WA. Whereas over 2093 were found in January 1995, and 1686 in January/February 1996, only 169 were found in August/September 1995 (118 sites surveyed, 43 positive) and 105 in August/September 1998 (81 sites surveyed, 33 positive).

Hints for finding Hooded Plovers

Hooded Plovers are often found at lake sites with rocky or stony outcrops, islands, or sandy spits. Sometimes, as well, or instead, there is an abundance of small cone-shaped shells along the lake edge and a wide bare lake margin.

Breeding sometimes occurs on small lakes or an overflow area near a much larger lake. As the small lakes dry out, the birds move to the larger lake. Hooded Plovers have occasionally been observed on recently dried lakes with no surface water. Coastally they appear attracted to inlets, estuaries and lagoons, and wide flat sandy beaches with rock outcrops. However they are also found on narrow and steeply sloped beaches. In inlets they may be on wide damp expanses well away from water. In sandy areas, footprints may be a give-away as often Hooded Plovers are the only small wader present. Of course to make a positive record it is necessary to actually see the bird but a fresh set of prints should intensify the search.

Project Progress

A meeting has been held in each of the four regional locations chosen as Hooded Plover management target areas (Yalgorup, Margaret River, Bremer Bay, Esperance). Everyone expressing an interest in attending one of these meetings was sent a draft management discussion paper. The paper was prepared by project officer Julie Raines and helped with background information and focus. The meetings all included local Birds Australia Western Australia Inc. members as well as members from other community groups. At least one CALM representative was present at each meeting and at Margaret River and Esperance there was local council representation.

The meetings served to introduce the project. The situation regarding knowledge and status of Hooded Plovers in the local area was outlined, threats were considered, and management difficulties discussed. The situation was very different in each of the locations.

An outcome of the meetings will be a list of Hooded Plover management requirements for each area, some of which may be achievable within the current project.

Brenda Newbey



Hooded Plover meeting at Bremer Bay in June
L-R: Lindsay Brown, Ken Broadbent (obscured),
Priscilla Broadbent, Peter Collins, Julie Raines,
Sarah Comer, Anne Gadsby
Photo: Brenda Newbey

This project was funded by the Natural Heritage Trust and WWF for Nature (Australia) and administered by the Threatened Species Network (TSN).

The project was organised and led by Shapelle McNee who was very ably supported by a willing band of volunteers.

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A reconnaissance trip was made in June 1999 with

Allan Rose, the Ranger, to view the sites where Western Ground Parrots had previously been recorded.

Two surveys were conducted in September 1999 and May-June 2000. Approximately 1940 ha were surveyed at a total of 111 listening posts. Despite these efforts, no Western Ground Parrots were located.

The apparent disappearance of the Western Ground Parrot from the 1984 sites, where previously recorded, may be due to a number of factors including heavy flooding during 1999 and 2000, predation by foxes and cats, or they may also have returned to sites previously destroyed by fire.

Shapelle McNee has produced a report on the Cape Arid National Park survey with a number of recommendations for continuing action in the vast area of heathland east of Esperance.

These include —

- To continue to put effort in to searching for the Western Ground Parrot within Cape Arid National Park and lands west of Cape Arid to Esperance. Priority areas need to be identified and agreed upon. Sources of funding need to be identified and pursued.
- To prepare detailed fire history maps for Cape Arid National Park and the uncleared lands between Cape Arid and Esperance. This will help identify high priority areas for searching.
- That the information brochure on the Western Ground Parrot being prepared by the WA Group of Birds Australia be distributed as widely as possible in the Esperance region.
- The possibility of translocating Western Ground Parrots to Cape Arid National Park could be considered if no Western Ground Parrots can be found.

THE SEARCH FOR THE WESTERN GROUND PARROT — CAPE ARID NATIONAL PARK



As part of the wider objective of implementing the Western Ground Parrot Interim Recovery Plan, Birds Australia WA Inc in cooperation with CALM has recently completed a project involving a search for the Western Ground Parrot in Cape Arid National Park and nearby areas.

