

## BIRDWATCHING ON THE CAPE RANGE PENINSULA

The Cape Range, with the smaller Rough Range, provides spectacular scenery with steep cliffs and rugged gorges. The coastal plains bordering the ranges are interspersed with sand ridges and dissected limestone uplands and creek beds. The predominant plant life is Spinifex with scattered eucalypts, acacias and other small shrubs. Along the coast are sandy beaches, intertidal mudflats and areas of mangroves.

With the surrounding seas, Ningaloo Marine Park and islands, this interesting area is home to just over 100 resident species of birds and over 60 annual visitors. Many of these birds are of great interest, for example Spinifexbird, Rufous-crowned Emu-wren and Striated Grasswren.

### Eastern Cape Range

Two roads run from the Exmouth Road into the Range. This is the area to look for Red-browed Pardalote, Grey-headed Honeyeater, Crested Bellbird, Little Woodswallow and Spinifexbird. The Rufous Emu-wren requires a search among the spinifex on ridges of gullies. The Striated Grasswren is best searched for in breeding season or early morning.

**1. Shothole Canyon Road** provides easy access into one of the gorges.

**2. Charles Knife Canyon Road** offers spectacular views through colourful gorges. Contact the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) office in Exmouth for a map of walk trails in the Cape.

### 3. Exmouth Town

Little Corella, White-plumed Honeyeater and Yellow-throated Miner are common around town. The golf course at the end of Willersdorf Road behind Talanjee Oval is worth a look. Do not disturb the golfers. Look for Emu, Banded Lapwing, Spinifex Pigeon, Australasian Pipit, Zebra Finch and for raptors such as Spotted Harrier and Nankeen Kestrel.

The sewage ponds are close to the golf course. There is no access inside the surrounding fence, but you



can see a good range of species. The best viewing is two small ponds on the north side. Look for waterfowl, shorebirds, terns, Silver Gull and Diamond Dove. Something unusual is possible in summer, such as White-tailed Tropicbird.

The boat harbour is just south of town along Horwood Quays. Look for Eastern Osprey, Silver Gull, terns and a few shorebirds.

### WEST COAST

A visit to the west coast on the Yardie Creek Road will provide a range of coastal habitats and birds.

Keep an eye out for a Spotted Harrier hunting low over the Spinifex. Watch out for Emu, Australian Bustard and Wedge-tailed Eagle.

In the thickets there may be Crested Pigeon, Variegated Fairy-wren, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Hooded Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Chiming Wedgebill, Grey Shrike-thrush and Grey Butcherbird.

The spinifex shrub land is the home of White-winged Fairy-wren, White-winged Triller (winter) and Spinifexbird.

On the limestone ridges among the Rock Figs (*Ficus platypoda*) are Western Bowerbird. Nearer the coast, look for Rufous Fieldwren.

**4. Millyering Visitor Centre** is 52 km from Exmouth. There are displays, an audio-visual facility and library with a wealth of information on the marine and national park.

**5. Turquoise Bay** is one of the highlights of a visit to the west coast. Snorkelling over the coral and fish life is a very popular pastime.

**6. Mandu Mandu Gorge** is 15 km south of the Visitor Centre. There is a 3 km walk trail along the northern scarp and a return walk along the pebbly/stony creek bed. You may prefer to walk part of the scarp trail and then go down to the creek bed. This is a good area for raptors, Spinifex Pigeon, Grey-headed and Brown Honeyeaters and Spinifexbird. The gorge walls echo to the calls of Pied Butcherbird and you should see Little Corella, Rainbow Bee-eater and Western Bowerbird. This is a good spot for a welcome rest stop and refreshments. Early morning is the best time to visit this gorge.

**7. Yardie Creek** is a popular picnic area with a sandbar to hold the water in the creek. Be sure to take the boat trip up the creek. A live commentary on the history of the creek and the birds and other animals that live on the cliffs makes for a very interesting trip. In season many birds nest in the rock cavities along the creek. You may see Eastern Reef Egret, Striated Heron, Little Corella and Nankeen Kestrel. Of interest also are the Rock Wallabies. Many birds will be observed flying in the gorge including the beautiful White-breasted Woodswallow. There is also a 1.5 km walk along the northern scarp.

#### THE MANGROVES

Mangrove species tend to form distinct zones depending upon soil and water conditions. They range from tall or dense forests with thick stems to woodland and stunted thickets. This diversity is important to birds that need special conditions. The following, however, are usually found in all mangrove areas of the Cape: Eastern Reef Egret, Striated Heron, Dusky Gerygone, White-breasted Whistler, White-breasted Woodswallow and Yellow White-eye.

#### WEST COAST

**8. Mangrove Bay** has channels that connect the sea with several open water lagoons. One of these has a bird hide that is best visited at high tide to watch the birds feeding in the lagoon or loafing on the rocks. This a good area for Bar-shouldered Dove and shorebirds in season.

**7. Yardie Creek** has a small area of mangroves. It is the southern limit for Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora*).

#### EAST COAST

**10. Gales Bay** at the base of Exmouth Gulf has a mangrove forest and is the southern limit for Mangrove Golden Whistler and Mangrove Robin.

**11. Bay of Rest** is the only area with thick-trunked *Avicennia* which are needed by the nesting Collared Kingfisher. Mangrove Golden Whistler and Rufous Songlark are also recorded here.

**12. Learmonth Creek.** Mangroves grow along two small creeks that run on to coastal mudflats. In season there is a very good range of shorebirds. This is another area for Bar-shouldered Dove.

**13. Giralia Bay,** although not on the Peninsula is very important for its seaward zone of thick-trunked tall trees changing to low forest then stunted thickets. Collared Kingfisher are recorded here.

#### 9. THE ISLANDS

There are several local tours to the Murion Islands where you may see sea birds such as Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Wilson's Storm-Petrel on the voyage. Wedge-tailed Shearwater and Fairy Tern breed here and Beach Stone-curlew are present, safe from foxes.

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*Australian  
Bustard*

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