Hi all welcome to the first edition of “The Western Warbler”. This is my first attempt at compiling a newsletter so please bear with me. Any constructive ideas you have will be looked at in an attempt to improve it. Naturally the idea of the newsletter is to keep our Wheatbelt Avon members up to date of what is going on in Birdlife Australia, and certainly it is a forum for you to tell us about your area, and items of interest.

In this edition I will include details of our current committee, with hopefully photos, and I would also like to commence with a section of a bird in focus, and Reserve in focus. For your information the committee is selected each year, usually about February where the timetable for the year is set. Because most of the committee come from the Avon Valley, the meetings tend to be held in Toodyay, however this is not set in stone, and certainly I would encourage you to become involved.

Insofar as excursions go we aim to have a week excursion outside of our boundaries. This has proved very popular for our group and they are well attended. This year in September we are off to Cheynes Beach. Smaller excursions of day, half days, weekends can occur outside our boundaries or within. We attempt to have at least two excursions in our local patch per year. The biggest difficulty with excursions is finding people to lead them. The leaders have to abide by Birdlife Australia guidelines and act with the Occupational Health and safety guidelines.
I would like for other people to lead excursions; there is nothing complex with it, and usually you will have people on the trip with previous experience, so give it a go.

**BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WHEATBELT AVON BIRD GROUP:**

This came about in 2009 when Max was on the Executive Committee of Birds Australia in Perth, with the general aim of creating bird groups in regional areas. He took his ideas to a well known birder in the Northam Shire by the name of John Masters, who became our first Convener. John and Max and another Northam identity Clinton Richter became the first committee. Max has held the position of Deputy Convener ever since.

The original name was Wheatbelt Avon Branch Birdlife Australia (WABBA); however as from this year 2020 this has now changed to the Wheatbelt Avon Bird Group (WABG).

The boundaries of our group is quite large, extending to Wagin, east to Merredin, over to Dalwallinu, and west to Gidgegannup. We have a number of Perth members who are on our distribution group, and attend many of our excursions.

**THE 2020 COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:**

**Convener:** Phil Lewis

Like many of you I always had an interest in nature and birds. As I was growing up we always seemed to have aviary birds of some sort and we had a very old copy of “What bird is that” by Neville Cayley that had belonged to my Dad.

I remember in my 30’s participating in bird banding with Stephen Davies in a beautiful patch of bushland in the Wyalkatchem Shire. Well that was when I really got hooked on wanting to see and identify the many species that were right under my nose, and from there it just escalated to being a bird nut. In relation to the photo, a group of us travelled out the back of Beacon where a farming family I knew had let us know a Bush Stone-curlew had made itself at home near the homestead. We were all sitting around taking photos when the bird walked so close to me I couldn’t focus on it.
I worked for 5 years with WWF and was involved with the Healthy Bushland project. This was a joint venture with WWF, Greening Australia, and the Wheatbelt NRM. I am also a volunteer and on the committee of the WA Malleefowl Recovery Group, and co-ordinate the monitoring of Malleefowl mounds in bushland near Dalwallinu, Latham, and Yeelirrie Station, near Leinster.

Deputy Convener: Max Howard

I became interested in birds when I was 15 living in Perth, and I was introduced to them by no other than the Duke of Edinburgh. At that time he had paid a visit to Perth, and because he was a very keen Ornithologist the evening newspaper commenced stories over a week of bird locations around Perth, so I was hooked. I joined the Gould League even though I was working, and then bought a camera, where eventually I met with my life time friends, Irene and Michael Morcombe, who took me under their wings and tried to explain how to take photos.

I have had an amazing life with birds, meeting some great people and visiting some fantastic locations. In 1980 I was on the committee of the Perth Naturalists Club, where I met my wife Elaine, and we both shared our love of Natural History. Some 39 years later we get immense enjoyment from our 10 acre property over the road from the Avon River, which we have worked hard towards creating a habitat for flora & fauna. To date we have recorded 85 species on our property, with new ones arriving regularly. I am currently compiling information on the birds of the Toodyay Shire, with the view of getting it published sometime in the future. I do volunteer work for the WA Museum in their Ornithology area, mainly recording their numerous egg collections.
I have been interested in birds since an early age, when in primary school my Grandfather, Jim Masters observed an influx of Rufous Songlarks on Glen Avon, the family farm. He encouraged me with an incentive to see how many nests I could find by patiently observing the birds. Living on Glen Avon I had divine habitats and birds to observe. I have always been interested in birds and their behaviour since then, together with an interest in all of nature.

I enjoy travelling to new places, and revisiting wonderful places, which includes the Murchison, Kimberley, and far North Queensland. Highlights include observing two male Chestnut Quail-thrushes having a territorial fight at Mt Jackson last year, and organising a tour with my Aunty Pam Masters to far North Queensland, seeing a total of 192 species of birds.

I am a member of Birdlife Australia, and participate in the bird data through BAWA. I am also involved with Avian Adventures, Toodyay Naturalists club, and Toodyay Friends of the River. Ornithology is a great hobby to have as you can be on your own, or in a group, and you can observe birds anywhere.

I look forward to more Pelagic trips, and observing more Grasswrens.
Having the opportunity to holiday with my family as a boy on Yunderup Island and to wander the bush, my head was full of all these strange sounds, of Red Wattlebirds, Magpie-larks, Grey Butcher birds, and Australasian Darters. The sounds I could hear but the birds I could not find. They were usually high in a tree and on the other side of the river.

I have always enjoyed the outdoors and being in the bush, and in my twenties I joined the WA Naturalists Club. For many years I was an active member of the Darling Range Branch on the WA Naturalists Club, until the arrival of the kids and our move to Toodyay.

With the kids now all grown and married, we again joined the Darling Range Branch, and more recently Wheatbelt Avon Bird Group. Many thanks for all those wonderful people who so kindly shared their knowledge and enthusiasm.

Allan Rose

Allan and his wife Sandy are currently touring the North of the state, so I don't have a photo of him. His email to me stated that he became interested in birds when he drove around Australia between 1977 – 1979. A friend gave them a bird guide subsequently the interest grew from that. Both Allan and his wife Sandy provided sightings for both the Atlas’s, and a do regular bird surveys for Ebird, and Bird data.

Allan was employed with Parks and Wildlife as a Ranger at various locations throughout the state.
BIRD IN FOCUS:

For this edition I have focused on the Pallid Cuckoo, as this species seems to be disappearing from Wheatbelt areas, or is now in low numbers compared to a few years ago. I would like to get your advice on what is happening in your area with this species. There seems to be an opinion that this bird is in trouble, why?, nothing seems to have changed in my part of the world. Recent intelligence tells us that in some places on earth there is a huge decline in the insect population, in same places by as much as 50%. This doesn't seem to be the case on my property.

In West Toodyay there still seems good numbers of the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, and the Bronzes, so why is there a problem with the Pallid. This year I have not sighted the species. Your thoughts on this please. Ron Johnstone from the WA Museum offered this as a possible cause, in that there has been heavy rainfall in the North and interior this year so conditions should be much better for birds in those areas compared to what we are experiencing in the south. John Masters informs me he has had a good look around the wheatbelt area, and has only a few sightings, well down on what you would normally expect.

RESERVE IN FOCUS:

I have included this section as we have so many beautiful nature reserves when our boundaries, and yes we have visited many of them, however there are many which we still need to see. This is where you can help the committee plan future excursions by nominating a reserve(s) in your area. Give us a bit of description of what you know about it.
WONGAMINE NATURE RESERVE – TOODYAY:

This is one of Toodyay’s amazing reserves, consisting of about 330 ha, with loads of flowering shrubs, and birds. A large list has been compiled from the area. It is situated on the eastern boundary of the shire and off the Goomallling – Toodyay Road. Springtime here is just magic. Our group has visited this place a number of times.

From one entry of the reserve you can travel through 4 different habitat types within about a kilometre. Salmon Gum, Heathland, Breakaway, and Wandoo bushland. This area is certainly worth a look if you are in the area. Upwards of 80 species have been sighted in this area.

INFORMATION ON COMING EVENTS

The Moore Catchment Council has a Bio Blitz’s at various locations throughout the wheatbelt. This year it is in Calingiri, see below, and the bird section is to be led by Phil, so please come along and enjoy the 24 hours. It is a great event, with like minded people. It covers all areas of natural history, not just birds. You will need to apply for this so please use the link below.

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS:

From our members Cheryl and Alan Warburton of York.

We live on a 2.5h block near York and conduct a bird survey most mornings, always in a clockwise direction. Two weeks ago on one particular morning we started off in the opposite direction and ended up in the top corner of the block which we visit infrequently, and I was asked to STOP! There at our feet was a spotted nightjar. We had never heard one calling, hear an Owlet Nightjar from time to time- but never a spotted. Quite made our day. It obliged us by staying in that spot while several photos were taken but disappeared later that day and we haven’t seen or heard it since.

Great article Cheryl and Alan and it shows what can occur in ramblings around your property. So folks have a go with yours, the information you get should be forwarded onto Birdlife Australia as sightings, or send to me and I will send them for you.

If you have an interesting article send it to me, with a photo if possible. I am hopeful that this newsletter will be sent out 4 times per year. Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring.
As some of you would be aware the Birds on Farms project by then Birds Australia commenced in 1995, with the intention of gauging how birdlife was going in farming areas. A number of you may even have been involved, I was, and I thought the project was fantastic.

In recent years surveys have again commenced in NSW and Victoria, as it has been 25 years since the commencement of the last program. At a recent tele conference with Regional bird groups in WA, this project was again mentioned, and I believe it should be reactivated to gauge current bird numbers.

I have suggested to the Executive of Birdlife WA that if members are agreeable could we again commence this project. If you could let me know your feelings on this matter, and if we are in agreement perhaps we could start the ball rolling.

Initially you only needed to survey a property at a minimum, once every season, although the number of surveys would be up to the observer.