

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRD NOTES

Editor: Graeme Chapman

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Meetings

The next quarterly meeting will be held in the Cygnet Hall, Hackett Drive, Crawley on Monday, 30th July at 8.00 p.m.

Mr. Jim Lane of the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife will speak on Pelicans.

PLEASE NOTE THE NEW MEETING VENUE. HACKETT DRIVE RUNS DOWN THE EAST SIDE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

1979 RAOU Congress at Kalgoorlie

Details of Congress programme are given in the accompanying RAOU Newsletter.

Eyre Bird Observatory

The beauty of Eyre continues to attract a steady stream of visitors. The recent sighting by Peter Curry of a Baird's Sandpiper, a very rare bird in Australia, is indicative of the unexpected visitors which pass through this "half way house" between east and west.

Facilities at Eyre are continually being improved and while the available funds must be prudently managed to a year-round supply of everyday essentials, many of the "home comforts" are only attainable through the generosity of members. Lounge furniture and bookcases are now on the want list. If you have anything you feel might be suitable, please contact Stephen Davies, Waters Upton, Mount Helena.

Vacancies are still available for the spring courses to be held at Eyre in October. Refer to the March newsletter for details.

Western Australia's rarest bird?

Few people when asked this question would answer without hesitation, but there is little doubt that, if it still survives, the western form of the Rufous Bristlebird is our rarest breeding species. Although usually classed as a subspecies of the Rufous Bristlebird which still survives in fair numbers in S.A. and Victoria, so little is known about the W.A. form that nobody can really be sure. The nest has never been found in this state and the last definite record of the bird was made at Cape Naturaliste in 1908. A bristlebird seen about 40 km further south near the Fishing Place in 1940 was deemed to be this species because of the habitat. More recently, a report of a "brown" bristlebird from the mainland opposite Sugarloaf Rock just south of Cape Naturaliste is equally likely to have been the Rufous, again because of the habitat. The writer also heard bristlebird type calls at this locality at Christmas in 1977.

If it still survives, the Rufous Bristlebird will probably be found in the strip of coastal country south of Cape Naturaliste for about 40 km. The habitat is the low, dense, coastal heath clothing the headlands overlooking the sea. The call, if like that of the eastern bird, is a loud clear succession of squeaky notes, begun by the male and finished by the female. Usually they are very shy, running along the ground through the shrubs and rarely showing themselves above the vegetation. However, if their call is played

back to them, like many birds, they become quite bold and may approach within a few feet of an observer.

The area they inhabit is very often windy, thus making detection even more difficult. Clear, still early mornings in spring would be the best time to look for them, or rather listen, but whatever you do if you go looking for them, take a tape recorder. Not only is it a valuable tool as described above, but a tape recording, however poor, is the best proof of which species you have encountered.

1979 Breeding Season

Almost all south-Western Australian birds breed between now and Christmas. Both the RAOU Nest Record Scheme and the Atlas of Australian Birds badly need notes about birds breeding in your area. The Nest Record Scheme will supply cards free of charge on which you can record the progress of nests you find in your garden, farm or park. These records, added together from all over Australia, provide the basic biological information without which predictions about the likely impact of developmental changes on the life of birds are mere guesses. It is hard to emphasise sufficiently how important the record of the Silvereye nesting in your garden really is. You may think Silvereyes are common but although they have been recorded in the Atlas from 253 grid blocks across Australia they have still only been found breeding in 88 blocks. So let me encourage you to go nest searching and to record your finds, both for the Atlas and the Nest Record Scheme. In south-Western Australia we badly need breeding records for Thornbills, Robins and Cuckoo Shrikes amongst the bush birds. The Herons are another group where information is very sparse. There do not seem to be many active Egret and Ibis rookeries at present, and any hearsay report is worth following up in the next six months. White-faced Herons don't nest in rookeries but generally nest alone, often far from water. White-faced Herons nested in small colonies in the south-west last year, but seem not to nest every year. Egrets, Ibises and Spoonbills generally nest in rookeries, each species timing its breeding season differently, so that the rookery may have breeding birds from July to December, but the species may change from month to month. So if you do find a colony in a swamp near your home visit it regularly to see how many species use it for breeding.

Mid-winter Wader Records

There is some, though by no means conclusive, evidence that the numbers and variety of northern waders (Sandpipers, Godwits, etc.) which spend the winter months within W.A. may be increasing. In order to obtain some idea of which waders are over-wintering, and where they are doing it, Peter Curry would be very grateful to receive details of any of the following species found during June and July:-

Red-necked Stint	Bar-tailed Godwit
Long-toed Stint	Black-tailed Godwit
Sanderling	Eastern Curlew
Curlew Sandpiper	Whimbrel
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	Ruff
Knot	Grey-tailed Tattler
Great Knot	Common Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper	Grey, E. Golden, Mongolian, Large
Broad-billed Sandpiper	and Oriental Dotterels

and, of course, any other rarer species. Basic information wanted is species, date, place and number. Details of state of plumage, particularly how many in non-breeding or partial breeding plumages would be very helpful. If you do see waders this winter, please drop a line to Peter Curry c/o CSIRO, Wildlife Research, Clayton Road, Helena Valley. W.A . 6056.