

## W.A. BIRD NOTES

### NOTES ON LITTLE AND LONG-BILLED CORELLAS IN W.A.

These two species rank high on the list of the most mis-identified birds in W.A., so perhaps the following comments will help minimise the number of suspect sightings which reach the Atlas office. Unfortunately, there are no easy ways of always telling the two Corellas apart.

Firstly, a word about the bird books. All the colour illustrations published, such as Slater, Cayly, Reader's Digest and Forshaw have chosen to show the eastern form of the long-bill with the striking orange chest band rather than its plain white counterpart from Western Australia. Thus no doubt a certain number of observations of "Little Corellas" in the far south-west are undoubtedly based on the premise that because it was white, it must be a Little Corella.

As clearly stated in Serventy's "Birds of Western Australia" the only way to distinguish the two species of corella in W.A. is on the shape of the bill. ~~T~~There is regional and individual variation in size and bill shape in the Long-billed Corella. From December to about June the young long-billed have shorter bills than the adults. For these reasons, detailed observations are essential at all times and at some times of the year it may be impossible to distinguish Little Corellas from young Long-billed Corellas. There may be differences in the calls but these are probably not discernible in the field.

The known zone of overlap of the two species occurs between Coorow and the Murchison River and west of Morawa. East and south of these limits, it is most likely that the white birds you see are Long-billed Corellas. There are exceptions. Perth metropolitan area has had a flock of mixed Little and Long-billed Corellas (and even the odd eastern states long-bill thrown in) for several years now. Undoubtedly many of these would have escaped or been released from captivity.

It is particularly annoying to see the birds from the east let loose on the local population. An even worse situation applies with Galahs - there are many eastern type Galahs (subsp. roseicapillus) wandering the Perth area. Elsewhere in the south-west, the sighting of a single Little Corella should be viewed with some misgiving. It is likely he (or she) may speak English. Such precocity should be noted on an Atlas form.

The best drawing showing the differences between the bills of the two species is published in Forshaw's "Australian Parrots". It emphasises the extra length of the lower mandible in the Long-billed which gives the distinct advantage when digging for bulbs, etc. However, most of the published drawings show the extremes of the two species. Greatest care should be taken in the area roughly between Perth and Geraldton and up to 150 miles to the east. Long-billed Corellas from this area do not always have noticeably long bills and certainly as far south as Coorow, Little Corellas are not uncommon.