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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 31st March at 8.00 p.m.

Peter Curry will speak on Migrants on the Niger Flood Plain, West Africa.

At the annual General Meeting held at the Zoo on January 4th the Committee was once again elected without change. A record attendance went to savour Tom Spence's hospitality and fine food. A big thank you to Tom for his generosity in the past which has come to make our New Year function an event to remember.

Results of a W.A. Group inquiry into the winter status of Palaearctic waders in the South-west.

The following account is compiled from observers' records of northern shore-birds found overwintering in the south-west in 1978 and 79. Although no systematic survey of any kind was attempted, there are probably enough records, from widely separated localities, to enable us to make some comment on the current winter status of the species found between May and August.

STATUS OF SPECIES

Above all others, Red-necked Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Bar-tailed Godwits were found to be common and widespread throughout the coastal south-west. Less-reported, but found locally in flocks were Turstone (Rottnest), Great Knot (Cockburn Sound), Knot (Albany and Rottnest) and Black-tailed Godwit (Metropolitan lakes). Four other species were reported widely, but nowhere more than 2 individuals in one locality: Greenshank, Grey-tailed Tattler, Common Sandpiper and Grey Plover. Five other species were reported once only: Marsh Sandpiper (3 together), Ruff, Long-toed Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Red-necked Phalarope. The latter was identified by Roy Wheeler, on Rottnest in August 1979 and is probably the first report of this species in the south-west.

ABSENTEES

At least 8 species which have been present in the south-west during summer were not reported during the winter period: Lesser Golden Plover, Large Sandplover, Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel, Pectoral, Terek, Wood Sandpipers and Sanderling. Of these, the lack of Sanderlings is of particular interest, since this infers that few, if any, overwinter in the south-west despite John Martindale's discovery that Sanderlings are commoner at Eyre during March to early May than at any other time of year. If large numbers of immature Sanderlings pass through Eyre so late in the autumn, where do they go for the winter?

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER

This species is one of the more numerous summer visitors, but it is

unusual in that the late summer exodus leaves effectively more behind. A single report of just one wintering bird confirms that this pattern remains unchanged. However, some reports indicate that the number present in summer are no longer as great as they were. Does anyone have any figures to support or deny this?

PLUMAGES

We had no winter records of any of the larger species in breeding plumage. Of the smaller species, 10% or more of the Red-necked Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Great Knots were seen in partial breeding colouration. One Curlew Sandpiper, at Thompson Lake in July, looked to be fully coloured. We don't know whether such birds belong to a different age-group from the rest.

HABITATS

Some changes in habitat were noted. For example, overwintering Curlew Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints were more numerous on the vegetated shallows of Thompson Lake than they were at their usual sites on the Swan Estuary. At this same time, various freshwater species which had occurred on the metropolitan lakes and other inland sites in summer (e.g. Wood Sandpiper, Long-toed Stint) were totally absent from the shoreline of Thompson. In general, the small freshwater-haunting species were absent from the winter rainfall zone in winter, although they have been reported from further north in W.A. at that time of year.

CONCLUSIONS

Records show that some Arctic-breeding waders do not return to the northern hemisphere during the northern summer, but remain dependant upon the resources of areas at the extreme southern end of their non-breeding ranges. If most of the birds which remain behind are first-year immatures, as has been suggested for small waders in Victoria (D.C. Paton & B.J. Wykes, *Emu* 78: 54-60) and elsewhere, then clearly the future recruitment of the Arctic breeding populations depends upon the survival and subsequent migration of these young birds. Hardly anything is known of their feeding ecology or survival rates in Australia. Are their numbers increasing or decreasing? Who would like to participate in wader counts to help us find out?

Many thanks to all those who provided information either verbally or by letter, in particular Allan Burbidge, Stephen Davies, John Malone, John Martindale, Bernie Masters, Peggy and Hartley Mitchell, May Moroney, Ian Rooke, Eric Sedgewick, Bob Smith, and Roy Wheeler.

Peter Curry.

NEEDED FOR EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY - HAVE YOU SOMETHING TO SPARE?

Carpet Sweeper, brooms (hairy, not nylon), casserole dishes, large storage jars or buckets with lids (for flour, sugar etc.), "Field Guide to Australian Birds" by Slater; tongs, kitchen knives, glasses, wooden spoons, flywire, trailer (unregistered will do).