

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRD NOTES.

Editor: Graeme Chapman.

Number 14, June 1980.

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

Dr. Graeme Smith will speak on The Noisy Scrub Bird.

OCTOBER LONG WEEKEND

An Excursion to Yallingup north of Margaret River has been planned for October 10-13. Caves House has agreed to let us occupy the whole of their Annexe, which can accommodate at least 48 people. Many of the rooms are to be shared so I would be glad if you could let me know if you are willing to share and with whom. The accommodation will be from Friday night 10th October and will cost \$24.00 a day each. Caves House requires a substantial deposit so we will need a deposit of \$5.00 per person by the 15th August. The programme for the weekend is being arranged by Dr. D.L. Serventy and among the objects of the weekend will be an intensive search for the Rufous Bristle bird. Possible sightings of this bird have been made recently in its former haunts and Simon Bennett, Project Officer of the World Wildlife Fund, will probably be in South Western Australia at that time and may be able to join the Excursion. This general area was the scene of many interesting discoveries in the last century and the early years of the present century, but has been strangely overlooked by bird observers in recent years. A list of published references will be forwarded to any enquirers on request.

Applications to join the Excursion should be sent to Mrs. J. Seabrook, L.36, Rabone Way, Boya, W.A. 6056. Tel. 2996816.

OBSERVATIONS

While holidaying at Rottnest in February, Graeme Smith and Denis Saunders sighted two Red-necked Phalaropes amongst a flock of Banded Stilts. The birds were seen in the same location from 4th - 7th February and during that time the identification was confirmed by John Raines, a visiting English ornithologist who was able to photograph them. They were seen on one of the salt lakes, always out in the water and when swimming, occasionally spun round on the spot, a characteristic action presumably to stir up food. The swimming habit is common in phalaropes and not unusual in the Banded Stilt. On February 8th the birds were gone.

THE AVON DESCENT v/s THE AVON RIVER AND ITS INHABITANTS

"Our man at Northam", long standing member Jim Masters has brought his detailed knowledge of the Avon River (which flows through his property) to bear on a conservation issue that may prove to be quite controversial in future months, and years. The following is an extract of a letter he wrote to a local authority, advising them on the conflict between boating enthusiasts and the fauna of the Avon River.

"Undoubtedly there are problems in the conservation of the Avon River arising from the magnitude to which this race has grown. Prolonged and increased boating activities at other times is also a factor that must have increasing impact on the river if not controlled.

The reason is that with strong river flow, normal in most years in June and July, water conditions are unstable, with constantly varying water levels and salinities, and reduced light penetration in the muddy water. Food supplies are low, and although wildlife populations are also low, they are in a period literally of adaptive 'hibernation' as it were, quite well protected. Such conditions also ensure that other refuge areas exist in well supplied water sources nearby the river.

The situation is totally different on years of drought as occurred this year during June and July, and also in all years normally from the end of August to mid January.

River waters remain more or less stable as to levels and salinities and light penetration being better in the cleaner waters, the whole annual breeding and rejuvenation cycles are underway and not lying dormant. When such conditions occur during winter it also indicates that all other refuge areas away from the river are poor, often non existent.

Prolonged and excessive disturbance under these conditions may well have long lasting effects on future viability of the Avon within the Shire as a functioning habitat and wildlife refuge, potentially affecting much of the water based wildlife of the whole district.

I would therefore suggest that there is a case for restricting all forms of large organised boating activities, not only power boats, after the beginning of September and over summer in all years, also over winter on drought years.

If organizers of such events will not recognize and respect these obvious natural disabilities of the Avon as a recreational boating area, then there is a strong case for prohibiting all forms of large organised boating events. Constant usage even by large numbers of canoeists poses future problems in the confined river waters of spring and summer".

KOOKABURRA RESEARCH

Recently in Western Australia, there has been considerable discussion about what place the Laughing Kookaburra should take in our environment. Comment has been extremely variable and the main issue is undoubtedly what these birds eat. There has been no detailed study to show what Kookaburras eat in W.A. and therefore there are few facts to help decide if the Kookaburra should be classified as friend or foe.

To help with this debate Ian Rooke is documenting the food that Kookaburras eat by analysing the stomach contents of road kills or specimens that people shoot on their properties.

You can help in this research project by collecting Kookaburra stomachs and sending them to Ian for analysis.

After you have taken the stomach out of the body cover it with 70% alcohol in a glass or solid plastic container with a well sealed lid. A 70% alcohol solution is most easily obtained by mixing about two parts methylated spirits with one part water. The seal of the lid can best be improved by taping it with electrical insulation tape. Pack the container securely to prevent breakage and send to Ian Rooke, C.S.I.R.O. Wildlife, Clayton Road, Helena Valley, W.A. 6056. You must also include when and where the bird was collected and a brief description of the habitat, e.g. along creek, in jarrah forest, roadway through pastured farmland, tree lined suburban street, etc.

ERROR: In the March issue of WA Bird Notes, p.2 line 1, the last word should read none not more.