

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRD NOTES.

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MEETINGS

We apologise for the delay in the newsletter that meant the last issue of these Notes reached you just after Boyd Wykes had spoken to the March meeting. We attempted to contact by phone everyone who had been to the last two general meetings and were sorry for those who missed out. The next two general meetings will be held at Cygnet Hall, Hackett Drive, Crawley.

Saturday, May 30 - Atlas Workshop, 2 pm CSIRO, Clayton Rd. Helena Valley.

Tuesday, June 30 - 8 pm Cygnet Hall - Ian Rowley will speak on
"Mate Selection"

Monday, September 28 - 8 pm Cygnet Hall, Roger Jaensch will speak on
the W.A. Waterbird Usage Survey.

A campout excursion is being arranged to begin from 2nd October, 1981 for eleven days to the 12th October. The headquarters of the camp will be on a farm near Boddington, kindly lent by Owen Nicholl's family. The farmhouse is unoccupied and the facilities will be available to us, including beds for eight people, kitchen and outdoor cooking, and toilet, parking and room for tents.

The purpose of the expedition will be to obtain breeding records for the System Six Atlas. Excursions will be arranged by Doug Watkins and Owen Nicholls. There will be a booking fee of \$2.00. On receipt of booking further information such as maps will be posted. A community meal will be provided in the evenings at a cost of \$4.00 per head per day. Those wishing to participate in this should send me either a deposit of \$2.00 a day or the full amount to cover whatever number of days are intended to be spent at the camp. The deadline for receiving deposits will be 28th August, so that catering can be planned. Boddington is no great distance so fresh supplies will be easily obtained.

Those people who can bring their own accommodation should do so as beds can then be reserved for people who do not have tent or campervan. People who need to reserve a bed should also let me know by 28th August.

The first local excursion was attended by no-one, but perhaps an announcement at the A.G.M. was not enough notice. If anyone would like to go on a local excursion one Saturday morning please ring Graeme Chapman, phone 2988491 to arrange a date.

EYRE:

Don't forget the courses that are running at Eyre Bird Observatory this year. There are still places in August, September and November courses which were listed in the last RAOU Newsletter. Full details can be obtained from the Warden, Eyre Bird Observatory, Cocklebidy, Via Norseman.

Peter Congreve made some interesting observations on White-fronted Honeyeaters there recently:

EAST TO WEST MOVEMENT OF WHITE-FRONTED HONEYEATERS.

The Observatory is situated towards the eastern end of the Nuytsland Flora and Fauna Reserve, in the coastal mallee belt south east of Cocklebidy, W.A. On the morning of 17 April, 1981 my wife, Diana and I were walking west from number ten station of the transect along the eastern track from the Observatory, counting the birds for the transect record. Between stations numbers nine and six we observed parties of White-fronted Honeyeaters, Phylidenyris albifrons flying west in loose groups. In the twenty five minutes it took to walk this stretch 205 were recorded along a swathe little more than fifty metres wide on each side of the track. After the sixth station the track tends southwards and only small parties were encountered. But half an hour later from the top of a high ridge the stream of birds was observed still to be passing to the west.

This honeyeater has been plentiful during February and March feeding in the flowering Eucalyptus oleosa of the coastal mallee belt at Eyre. This blossom is now nearly over and these honeyeaters must be moving in search of a new food source. G.S.Chapman's observations of the movement of large numbers of this species in October, 1970 and January, 1981 (Chapman, WA Bird Notes 17, February 1981) lend interest to this movement. The southward flow observed by him in January, 1981 could be to the mallee areas to feed on the summer flowering eucalypts. Their return in April would be logical.

P.Congreve, Warden, Eyre Bird Observ.

The Atlas maps are providing a great deal of food for thought. The Water Rail, Rallus pectoralis, is a particularly interesting case. It appears to be represented by a separate subspecies in W.A. but there are only four specimens, one in the Australian Museum from King George's Sound and three in the British Museum, two from Margaret River and one from 'W.A.' The W.A. bird differs from that of the eastern states in having a longer bill and generally in being slightly larger. It has not been reported during the Atlas fieldwork and, indeed, the only record this century is the sighting of Whittell near Bridgetown reported in Serventy & Whittell, Handbook of Birds of W.A. Anyone who thinks that they see this species should let us know at once. It favours fresh running streams, rather than swamps and would be easiest to see at dawn and dusk. Footprints on the shore are a good give away, but there are no specimens in local museums with which to compare measurements. What particularly concerns us about this species is that its occurrence matches that of the three S.W. species whose range has shrunk most since European settlement, the Noisy Scrub-bird, the Bristlebird and the Western Whipbird. Is the S.W. Water Rail another member of that special S.W. fauna that took such a knock when settlement took over the most favoured sites of the wettest corner of the State?

Another endemic W.A. form about which almost nothing is known is the Dusky Warbler, Gerygone tenebrosa. Some of you who have reported it to the Atlas will have been contacted and asked for more details. Anyone else who has good observations of it please let us know. The same goes for the Black Bittern, Brown Bittern and Bush Stone Curlew. These are all species not reported from the Southwest as often as they used to be. We need good, positive records of them to help in defining those areas that should be preserved to ensure their survival.

WATERBIRD USEAGE SURVEY

Roger Jaensch from South Australia arrived in W.A. in April to start work as the field officer for this project which is funded by grants from the W.A. Department of Fisheries & Wildlife and W.A. Wildlife Authority. He will establish an office near Perth and be seeking your help in this new and exciting project which will contribute enormously to the conservation of wetlands in the Southwest. Roger is himself knowledgeable about Crakes and Rails and is looking forward to meeting WA RAOU members.