



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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Quarterly Newsletter of the W.A. Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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## THE ATLAS AT LAST

*YOU*  
*are cordially invited to*  
*attend the official W.A. Launching*  
*of the*

### **Atlas of Australian Birds**

*by*

His Excellency  
Professor Gordon Reid,  
Governor of Western Australia

*on*

**WEDNESDAY 18th JULY**  
at 6.00 P.M.

*in*

**THE UNDERCROFT OF  
WINTHROP HALL**  
University of Western Australia

*Dress: Semi-Formal*

After seven years of preparation the Atlas is complete. To celebrate this auspicious achievement, the W.A. Group of the RAOU is holding a launching party to which everyone with an interest in or connection with the Atlas is invited.

There is no entry fee but we would ask you to bring either a plate of supper or something to drink.

The party really is for everyone so please come and help to make the Atlas launch a great success.



The Perils of Atlassing.

(PHOTO: BERNIE MASTERS)



Atlassers climbed every mountain in search of records.

(PHOTO: STEPHEN DAVIES)

## COMING EVENTS CALENDAR

Jun. 25	— Meeting, U.W.A., Mike Brooker.
Jul. 6-9	— CAMPOUT, Rottnest Island.
Jul. 18	— Atlas Launch, U.W.A. Undercroft.
Jul. 28	— Local Excursion, Bickley Brook.
Aug. 6	— Meeting, U.W.A., Ground Parrots.
Aug. 11	— Local Excursion, Herdsman.
Aug. 18	— Day Trip, Yanchep.
Sep. 8-9	— CAMPOUT, South Coast/South-West.
Sep. 15	— Day Trip, Avon Valley.
Sep. 24	— Meeting, International Waterbird Research.
Sep. 29-Oct. 1	— CAMPOUT, Dryandra (Combined).
Oct. 14	— Local Excursion, Alfred Cove.
Oct. 20-21	— Moora or West Gingin Campout.
Nov. 3-4	— Woodanilling Weekend.
Nov. 17	— Day Trip, wheatbelt wetlands.
Dec. 1 or 8	— Bird Tally and Social Night.
Dec. 16	— Local Excursion, Swan River.

**Note:** Dates and places from Oct. 14 onwards are tentative — check next newsletter.

## COMING MEETINGS

Meetings are at present held in the Mathematics Lecture Room 1, near Fairway Entrance No. 3 (actually opposite the Weatherburn Lecture Theatre), at the University of W.A. campus. The March '84 and December '83 issues of the newsletter contain maps of the approaches to this room.

There is some debate at present as to the suitability of this venue for our needs. Comments from members would be appreciated and these should be directed to Committee members.

Meetings commence at 8.00 p.m. and include tea and biscuits afterwards. Visitors are especially welcome.

### Monday, June 25: Mike Brooker

Mike has joined the CSIRO Rangelands and Wildlife research staff at Helena Valley this year. He has worked in the past with **Wedge-tailed Eagles** on the Nullarbor and more recently with waterbirds at the **Macquarie Marshes** in N.S.W. and **Kakadu National Park** in Arnhem Land. At this meeting Mike will speak about aspects of his work in one of these fields.

### Monday, August 6: Ground Parrots/Future activities

The Field Officer for the Ground Parrot Survey, (Doug Watkins) will review progress with the study and outline his approach to the coming months of fieldwork. The Field Officer for the Waterbird Project (Roger Jaensch) will present a similar report on waterbirds: this project is moving into its final year.

If time permits, discussion about future activities in Western Australia might be arranged.

### Monday, September 24: Bird study in the Northern Hemisphere, especially Asia

Australia has moved into an era of greater international cooperation in bird study and conservation programmes. The RAOU will probably become actively involved in a broad survey of waterbirds in southern Asia in 1985.

Roger Jaensch will present an illustrated report on ornithology in Japan and Hong Kong, as well as wetland reserves and waterbird management in the U.K. and Netherlands. A number of WA Group members generously supported his recent tour.

Mike Bamford and/or Doug Watkins will then report on *Interwader 83*. This wader study expedition to Singapore and Malaysia was supported by the RAOU and set the stage for further work in south and east Asia.

## COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

We are attempting to alternate between Saturday and Sunday excursions from September onwards, provided that this arrangement brings good response. After August, we also hope to plan excursions for as near as possible to the middle (i.e. 15th) of each month, on a trial basis.

The Excursions Sub-Committee of the RAOU-WA Group has decided to place some control on the number of major/"Official" RAOU campouts that it organises each year. In 1984 we propose to run no more than four such events: one has passed (Torbay — Jan.) and three are outlined below.

Individuals or groups of members are certainly free to organise additional campouts and to publicise these in *WA Bird Notes*. If they wish to use the RAOU's name in conjunction with a campout, the Excursion Sub-Committee (contact at RAOU Office-WA) should first be consulted.

### CAMPOUT — Friday July 6 to Monday July 9: Rottnest

Following the very successful '83 campout it is planned to run a long-weekend on the Island. All members and guests are welcome. Full accommodation and board will cost approx. \$9 per night. You are welcome to attend for a day visit at no cost.

Proposed itinerary:

- Seabirds — outing to west end.
- Tern colonies.
- Waders.
- Over-wintering passerines.
- Informative talks, e.g. Tom Perrigo will talk on the plans for Rottnest Island (Tom is consultant to the R.I.B.).
- Video — bird films.

A special concession is available for those who *book early* to go by air. The return fare would be \$12.80 (normally \$24.40) however we need at least 10 persons.

Contact Steve Keeling — 291 7592 or RAOU Office.

### Saturday, July 28: Bickley Brook

This will be the first of three excursions led by Dr Stephen Davies in conjunction with his bird study courses at the University of Western Australia. Meet at 0900 at the barbecue area beside Bickley Brook Reservoir. We hope to find cuckoos calling in the wandoo woodland and honeyeaters busy feeding in the early-flowering heath. All members and visitors welcome.

### Saturday, August 11: Herdsman Lake

Meet at 0900 in Floreat Waters Estate, Churchlands, at the city end of Lakeside Drive (small carpark). The second of Dr Davies' excursions. Participants will be able to see the rapidly emerging Wildlife Study Centre as well as deepwater birds such as (perhaps) the Great-Crested Grebe, Hardhead and Blue-billed Duck.

### Saturday, August 18: Yanchep

Meet at 0830 at the Ocean View Tavern on Wanneroo Road in Wanneroo. Drs. Shannon and Davies will lead the Group to the Yanchep area where late-flowering banksias might provide nectar feeding birds for us to enjoy. Some banding of bushbirds may also be in progress during some part of the day.

**CAMPOUT — On the Weekend of September 8-9** and in the preceding week, the RAOU will be searching for *Ground Parrots* in the South-West. This will require a camp of willing participants possibly near either Busselton/Capel or Northcliffe. When the Ground Parrot Field Officer commences his work in June he will confirm the campout location and will notify members of details via a circular. Please keep these days free!

### Saturday, September 15: Avon Valley

Last year we went to Walyunga National Park and learnt that little bird data had been gathered for that Park. This year we propose to visit the scenic Avon Valley National Park and compile a bird list for the areas visited. A broad variety of bushbirds should be present, many of them breeding. If time is available

we may also look for Shrike-tits in the powder-bark wandoo at Majestic Heights, Toodyay. All interested persons should meet at 0800 at the intersection of the Toodyay (Red Hill) Road and Bunning Road at Gidgegannup (roughly 25 km from Midland), or at the nearest parking opportunity on the Toodyay side of this junction. This will be a full day outing: newcomers welcome as always.

**CAMPOUT — Saturday, September 29 to Monday, October 1: Dryandra Forest and district**

The RAOU has been invited to join the joint long-weekend campout of the W.A. Naturalists Club and the Bird Observers Club of Victoria, at Dryandra. We will probably organise the programme for Monday: this may include visits to the Narrogin Lakes, where nesting ought to be in full swing. Accommodation and other details in September issue.

We had hoped that outings for the rest of 1984 could have been finalised by now but this has not been possible. **The following dates are fairly certain, though locations are still tentative.** Final details will appear in the September newsletter.

The organisers of RAOU events welcome suggestions of places to visit and improvements that could be made to the whole excursion programme.

**Sunday, October 14: suggestion — Alfred Cove**

Starting time will depend on tides. This place is famous for its Buff-banded Rails, Terek Sandpipers, nesting stilts and varied waders and bushbirds.

**October 20 to 21: suggestion — Campout North of Perth**

Two suggestions have been put forward for campouts, organised by members, at this time of year.

viz. **Moora district:** timbered lakes, salt lakes, sandplain, salmon gums.

or **West Gingin ("Samphire"):** as per 1983 camp — freshwater lakes and swamps, coastal heath, sandplain.

Visits to one or both of these locations will probably be organised.

**November 3 to 4: suggestion — Woodanilling**

Many members have asked if we could repeat the highly successful 1983 stay at Woodanilling. We hope to obtain help from local ornithologists in order to run this event.

**Saturday, November 17: suggestion — Wheatbelt wetlands**

Near Brookton or near Goomalling. The final choice between these two areas will depend upon waterlevels in early August (full day trip).

**Bird Tally and Annual Social Night: December 1 or 8**

(Saturday Evening)

We hope to repeat the immensely successful 1983 tally and social night, virtually in identical fashion. We need strong indication from members as to which date they prefer. It will be useful to compare 1984 bird tally findings with those for 1983. The W.A.I.T. grounds venue seems most suitable.

**Sunday, December 16: suggestion—remnant habitats of the Swan River Valley and/or Whiteman Park.**

Any person requiring transport to RAOU excursions or campouts should contact the RAOU Office (WA) on (09) 364 6202.

## MEETING REPORTS

**February 27: RSPB Videos**

This was our first meeting at the University of WA Maths Lecture Room and a crowd of more than 70 members and visitors was in attendance. Ros Denny capably chaired the meeting in the absence of the Chairman.

Two RSPB Videos were screened, both being of superb quali-

ty as promised! "The Secret Reeds" gave an insight into the seasonal dynamics of reed-swamps and their bird populations. Of course, the highlights were sections displaying the Eurasian Bittern and Water Rail: these birds become relatively tame when forced to range widely for food during icy winters.

Although cliff-nesting seabirds are relatively unimportant in Australia, the "Seabirds" video included spectacular footage of diving gannets, puffins and terns. This set us thinking about the feeding methods of seabirds in our own waters.

The evening concluded with a tape of Eyre Bird Observatory and dune stabilization and a brief audio visual (starring several members and using many of Bert Wells' slides) of the Waterbird Project. Despite some difficulty with security arrangements, tea and coffee were enjoyed in the nearby Maths Lounge.

**March 26, Peter Curry — Muttonbirds**

With the business of the meeting completed, Ros Denny introduced Peter Curry to speak on Muttonbirds. Peter Curry captured his audience's attention and imagination as he unfolded the life history of the Tasmanian Muttonbird (the Short-tailed Shearwater). The detailed knowledge presented by Peter was the result of work done by Dom Serventy and his co-workers on Fishers Island in the Furneaux Group off north-east Tasmania. This involved an extensive banding program of immature and adult birds on Fishers Island. Fishers Island is one of many islands in which the Short-tailed Shearwaters have their nesting burrows.

The great volume of data collected from this work is being analysed by Dr Stuart Bradley, Dr Ron Wooller and Peter Curry. Peter was able to reveal the history of an individual female shearwater with records of its various mates and nesting successes and failures. Although this bird occurs in very high numbers it is only known to breed in Australia. On some islands in Tasmania this bird is exploited commercially. Nestlings are taken at particular times of the year for food and the down-feathers. It is thus of benefit to understand these birds as well as possible. The meeting was well attended.

## EXCURSION REPORTS

**Torbay Campout, Albany: January 27-30**

Forty-eight members attended this campout for which we used once again the excellent facilities of the Woodbury-Boston School at Torbay. From here we were led to a variety of localities by Doug Watkins, Roger Jaensch: Torbay Hill, Grasmere Lake, Torbay Inlet, Mutton Bird Island and Lake Seppings, then further afield of Two People's Bay, Lake Angove, Wilson's Inlet and Ocean Beach (Denmark).

In the camp's vicinity we were interested to see Black-shouldered Kites and two Little Eagles, Red-Winged Fairy-wrens, and Red-eared Firetails. At Torbay Inlet we were especially pleased to find two Ospreys roosting close to their nest in a dead Karri tree, just where we had seen them in March 1982 on our previous campout. Here the whole group had close and leisurely sightings of two Crested Shrike-tits.

While following the Rotary Bird Walk around Lake Seppings in Albany, Ros Denny among a group of us, first sighted a bird standing on the banks of Lake Seppings which provoked cries of "a snipe" from Doug as it flew off. With further sightings of this bird it was identified as a *Gallinago* snipe (species undetermined!) See WA Bird Notes March No. 29 page 1.

On three evenings some of us listened at dusk on the track to Lake William, for calls of the Ground Parrot, where Bert Main had reported several sightings. However, we had no success on these occasions although it appears to be likely habitat.

At Two People Bay, the Ranger Graeme Folley spoke to the group about the translocation project of Noisy Scrub-birds from Two Peoples' Bay Nature Reserve to Mt. Manypeaks Nature Reserve (see story in SWANS No. 2, 1983). Graeme's account of the problems involved was particularly interesting.

Thanks to everyone who helped to make this campout a great start to the year.

D. Beckingham

#### **February 4: Thomsons Lake**

This summer's Thomsons Lake excursion proved just as popular as in previous years. The assemblage was split into three parties, ably led by more experienced members and after a careful search for bushbirds everyone met on the lake-circuit track. Reports indicated a fair variety of species including White-backed Swallows, a Hobby, a Sacred Kingfisher and Royal Spoonbills overhead. Numbers were fairly low except in the case of Weebills.

During observations from the east side and while walking through the shallow central parts of Thomsons Lake, we were exposed to the devastation that botulism had inflicted on the waterbirds. More than 170 recognizable carcasses (mostly Pacific Black Ducks) were counted. More information on the phenomenon appears later in this issue.

Shovelers were still numerous (more than 1,000), as were Marsh Harriers (at least 6) and Black-winged Stilts (2000-but none dead). Five Long-toed Stilts were flushed by the last of the group as it left the lake edge at midday.

#### **February 18: McLarty L. — Mealup L.**

Although a few unsuspecting souls had not come suitably prepared, most of the 30 or so participants in this glorious event were garbed in waders and other types of mud-gear. From the southern shores the group enjoyed a passing Peregrine and counted three hundred herons grabbing food in the receding marshes.

A *Gallinago* snipe had been located here by the Field Officer on Feb. 12: some members were fortunate to see a snipe fleeing from the same area of collapsed rush during the excursion. Most birdos were able to inspect Long-toed Stilts at close range with spotting scopes: several newcomers were particularly impressed!

After trudging half-way around the lake, seeing 20 Wood Sandpipers and little else, the mob drove to the Goodale Sanctuary. Following a roadside lunch, a stroll along paths to the lakes added nesting darters and several honeyeaters and warblers to the bird list of 63 species.

Some enthusiasts searched the dense wet shrubbery and rushes for nests (several Musk Duck nests were found) while others returned to Perth. Later, the remaining troops looked at the very boggy, rapidly drying Mealup Lake. An apparent Sacred Ibis-Royal Spoonbill hybrid provided considerable interest, as did an Australasian Bittern and closeby Spotless Crakes. At times the air was thick with rising egrets, ibises, herons and ducks.

Once again, this part of the Swan Coastal Plain proved its importance to waterbirds and outstanding value for ornithologists.

#### **10 March: Bibra Lake**

It was a fine, warm morning when about 35 people assembled at Bibra Lake. The lake still had a large amount of water in it but was low enough to leave exposed mud on the edges of the north and south-west ends. With telescopes and binoculars at the ready we made our way around the north end of Bibra Lake. A large number of waders feeding on the mud at the north-east end attracted people's attention. At this site we were treated to about 20 Black-fronted Plovers and some good sightings of a Spotless Crake. Fully enthused we walked our way around Bibra Lake to finish where we started. In total 62 species were seen. These included waterbirds and bushbirds. A total of 6 species of raptor were seen including Marsh Harrier, Black-shouldered Kite, Whistling Kite, Little Eagle, Australian Hobby and Nankeen Kestrel.

S. McNee

#### **Campout: Wellington Mills, 30th March — 1st April**

Twenty-one members led by Brice Wells and Ron Van Delft enjoyed the pleasant bush setting of the D.Y.S.R. Chalets at Wellington Mills, south-east of Collie. It was a good place for arm-chair bird-watching with Red-eared Firetails, Western Rosellas, Currawongs, Splended Fairy-Wrens, Yellow-rumped Thornbills and various honeyeaters in full view on the lawns near the Chalets. Thirty-three species were noted in the vicinity and twenty-seven species were seen around the Wellington Dam and Collie River.

A ten kilometre walk through jarrah and blackbutt trees and along the scenic Collie River occupied most of Saturday, while on Sunday we were interested to see the 'Night Heron Colony' adjacent to the Titanium Plant in Australind. At the mouth of

the Preston River near the Bunbury Power Station we saw a variety of waders including Bar-tailed Godwits, Great Knots, Grey Plovers and Greenshanks.

D. Beckingham

#### **8th April: Mandurah—Coodanup—Serpentine River**

Twenty-four bird-watchers arrived at 8 a.m. sharp for a look around the Peel and Mandurah area.

First we went down to Coodanup, looking at various areas along the estuary towards the Serpentine River. Here there were good wader sightings with cooperative birds allowing beginners to look through telescopes and learn how to identify the different species.

At the mouth of the Serpentine a group of Godwits was observed, and one member of our group explained how two of the birds in the group of 25 were a couple of mm taller and a slightly different colour. "Most likely Black-tailed Godwits", he said. With everyone at the ready Bob Goodale, the group leader, put the birds to flight revealing a very rare sight: 25 Black-tailed Godwits flew off.

We all lunched on the banks of the river before going to the Mandurah sea-wall where we were treated to Roseate Terns, Common Terns, (most uncommon in these parts) and Australian Gannets, which rounded off a very good day's bird watching. The day finished with us all being entertained by an Australian Sea Lion.

## **EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY**

Life at the observatory has been busy, with 388 visitor nights recorded for the first quarter of the year. (Visitor nights are calculated from the 1st December to the following 30 November). By the end of May there will be over 700. A very fitting place for Di and I to hand over on the 1st June. It is great to know that the observatory will be in good hands. Nick Dymond will be Warden and Jill Smith and Peter Higgins his Assistants. Nick has had a lot of experience and will be a competent warden and a staff of three will give greater versatility to the work of the observatory and the interests of visitors. Eyre is beautiful in winter, which is mild and pleasant, and with a good fire in the evening, very relaxing. Come and spend time in July and August. The Southern Right Whales arrive in July to wean their calves.

The spring movement of waders through Eyre along Kanidal Beach, from 7th August to 5th February 1984 was remarkable for the small numbers of Red-necked Stint recorded, only 166. Most other species were also scarce, but numbers of Ruddy Turnstone and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers increased. The tally of Sharp-tails would have been much higher, but no count was taken during the Shore Birds course when over ninety were present on the weed beds of Nine Mile. A Pectoral Sandpiper was also present and some good photographs were taken of it by Mark Bonnin. In spite of persistent efforts it eluded the cannon net; once standing just out of range as our fickle tide retreated. The first Double-banded Plover was recorded on 20 February and Red-necked Stint, mostly in a partial breeding plumage, started to return. By 24 April 294 had been recorded with twelve Sanderling and a Curlew Sandpiper. Double-banded are now conspicuous and are tolerated by the Red-capped Plovers in whose territories they find themselves.

In the grasslands bordering the highway Crimson Chat were present at the end of February and in March, and Di saw a Bustard in January. The Banded Lapwing has returned and is busy with its courtship rituals. In February the Malleefowl which had been working the mound west of the microwave tower stopped. The mound was opened but contained no eggs, so the late laying in November must have been successful. Parties of Rainbow Bee-eaters were encountered at the top of the escarpment on the 15 and 16 February flying west on their long journey north. More than thirty were counted. On the 8th March a record of 107 Pink Cockatoos came in to drink at the water points north of the observatory. In early April Ground Cuckoo-shrike were seen by the Wildlife Survey team in the fringes of the mallee on the Tableland. On the 15th April the air around the house was suddenly full of Tree Martins, but I did not see their passage.

They were gone by the evening.

At Eyre, honeyeaters have been the most conspicuous group of birds, after the morning and evening conversation of Pink Cockatoos. Singing Honeyeaters have been abundant. This species with the other short billed honeyeaters, the Purple-gaped and White-eared remain here all the time subsisting on berries of *Raghadia* and insects during the period in January, when there is no blossom. Usually most birds of the other honeyeater species disappear during December, returning when the Mistletoe starts to blossom in early February. New Holland have increased in numbers, but their close relation the White-fronted Honeyeater, after its invasion in 1982 has been scarce. In August and September 1983 they were in good numbers at Nine Mile and Twilight Cove, but only a few reached Eyre. In April Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters and White-fronted have been recorded on the escarpment, but not in any numbers, and Purple-crowned Lorikeet have been heard near the escarpment. Their presence might foreshadow a good flowering of *Eucalyptus gracilis*, which is common in that area.

It remains for Di and I to say Au revoir and thank you, to all those wonderful people who have supported the observatory during our years here, our visitors and the Friends of Eyre and to ask you to continue your support, for Eyre will need you. We hand over to Nick Dymond and his staff on the 1st June and will be leaving about 16th June.

## FAREWELL TO EYRE

We leave you sadly,  
Paradise and serpents too,  
Memories of Eyre.

Di.

## COURSES

26 August -  
1 September

**Botany.** Dr. Neville Marchant will lead this course, which will be a continuation of the course of July 1983 set in a different season. The enthusiastic support given by amateur botanists on that course did much to obtain the good collections of plants made. Their continued support is sought for this work.

2-8 September

**Reptiles.** The course which is the second on this subject will be led by Dr. Mike Bamford. The methods of catching reptiles in the field, their measurement in the hand and how to identify them and record them will be demonstrated. Our lizards are a fascinating section of the life in the mallee. Last January, during Mary Dyer's course 125 individuals were caught (belonging to eighteen species), measured and released.

16- 9 September

**Field Ornithology.** This will be the fifth course on this subject. It will again be led by Dr. Stephen Davies assisted by the Warden. The course will include mist netting as a means of studying birds in the hand, census techniques and counting birds, nests and territories and the interpretation of data gathered. However, the subject matter may be changed to match the changing weather pattern at the time of the course.

28 October -  
3 November

**Shore Birds.** Petery Curry and the Warden. The influx of migratory waders to the beach near Eyre reaches a peak during the last week of October and the first week of November.

## A TRIBUTE TO PETER AND DI CONGREVE

In April 1981, the first of my many visits to Eyre, I stepped off the bus as it ground to a halt at Cocklebidy and wondered why a bird observatory would be sited in such a desolate area. I was further astounded when I realized that, despite making prior arrangements through the mail, there was no one to greet and transport me the rest of the way to Eyre. Had I arrived at the right place? Maybe I mixed up the arrival dates? Doubts subsided one hour later when a white Suzuki ("Suki") bearing the RAOU emblem pulled up beside the roadhouse and out stepped an elderly, moustachioed gentleman dressed in khaki and wearing a green beret — my first encounter with Peter Congreve. I was rather taken aback when he welcomed me and apologized for being late (he had been pursuing mallee fowl on the way) in a posh, regimental accent which appeared to be so out of place in the harsh Australian outback. But Peter was in his element as he skilfully manoeuvred the vehicle across the barren plain, down the steep and rocky escarpment and along the sandy dune tracks through the dense coastal mallee as we headed for Eyre. Di Congreve warmly greeted us upon our arrival at Eyre and had thoughtfully prepared an appetizing, and much appreciated lunch; one could not help feeling like royalty. As others will no doubt testify, such a heartfelt welcome by both Peter and Di was extended to every visitor to Eyre.

The dedication and enthusiasm of Peter and Di as guardians of Eyre are beyond reproach and often outside the realms of their duties, like the time they catered for, entertained, and transported to and fro over 25 visitors on two successive days, or when a visitor (guess who?!) was motored at midnight to Cocklebidy in torrential rains to catch a 3 a.m. bus back to Perth, subsequently waiting for 5 hours in the vehicle at temperatures close to freezing point for the delayed bus to arrive, or the many guided tours of Eyre and the provision of meals for the numerous visitors who arrived unannounced. Yet, despite all this and much more, often physically and mentally taxing work, Peter and Di never outwardly complained to anyone.

Previous to moving to Eyre in 1981 the Congreves had already helped in renovating the house, but upon taking up residence they have gradually transformed it into a comfortable "home away from home". Who could ask for more than to sit in comfort at night around a burning fire with classical music playing in the background, and listening to Di tell of their exploits in India and Kenya (did you ever hear the elephant stories?) and even tales of their school day pranks, whilst poor Peter would entertain us with his snoring! They are truly the Raj of Eyre.

Peter and Di have contributed much to the knowledge, not only of Australian birdlife, but of wildlife in general during their reign at Eyre. Peter's tireless banding efforts have resulted in over 1000 birds a year being banded and has consequently gathered much information on local movements of bird populations, ageing and sexing of birds and patterns of feather moult. His patience and powers of observation have enabled him to discover many nests. Transect analyses undertaken with religious fervour each week culminated in the sighting (and a photograph) of a Buff-breasted Sandpiper — the first record of this species in Western Australia. And one cannot help mention the mighty efforts of Di as saviour of the nesting Welcome Swallows in chasing away the predatory Grey Butcherbird from the verandah with her broomstick!

As well as being perfect host and hostess, warden and assistant and researchers, Peter and Di played a great role in educating both birds and non-birds alike, from children to the elderly, on subjects ranging from bird-watching to local history, particularly during the organized courses. It soon became obvious to me and many others that their years of experience in the bush have truly made them a wise and respected couple.

Peter and Di are retiring from Eyre to their home in Beverley, and I'm sure that Eyre's loss will be Beverley's gain. I have tried to express the appreciation of the RAOU and the multitude of visitors to Eyre for the contributions the Congreves have made

to Eyre and ornithology at large, but that is not possible in just a few paragraphs. I personally would like to thank them for the endless moral and manual support they gave me during my studies at Eyre, and I am sure we all wish them the very best for the future. **Individual members can further show their gratitude by sending a donation to the W.A. branch office of the RAOU for a suitable retirement gift.**

Finally, as the Eyre Bird Observatory moves into a new technological era the RAOU wishes Nick Dymond future success and happiness as the next warden of Eyre.

Stephen Ambrose

## THE VICTORIAN ATLAS

When the Atlas of Australian Birds is published, in July this year, Australia will have readily available, accurate maps of the distribution of all Australian birds. These maps will show whether or not each species lives or breeds in each one degree block. The 812 one degree blocks in Australia divide the continent into parts that look small on the map but are really very large, 10,000 sq km, especially when it comes to saying just where each bird can be seen. The Atlas will have with it a map that shows the distribution of the eight main kinds of vegetation in Australia. Using the overlays that will be optional extras to the Atlas, the distribution of a species can be correlated with the distribution of vegetation on a continental basis. But the resolution, that is the exactness of the correlation, is coarse. It doesn't often help to find exactly how much a species depends on a particular kind of vegetation in a particular locality.

We knew these limitations when we set out to plan the Atlas and that is why we collected as much data as we could on a ten minute grid. Each ten minute grid is an area of 100 sq km. Even that is large, but it is very much more useful for planning where to put conservation reserves than the information collected on a one degree basis.

Four atlases of bird distribution using grid blocks of about 100 sq km in area have been published. The first was one of the Adelaide area, then there was one of the Melbourne region. The RAOU's own field atlas covered part of the south coast of N.S.W. and the whole of Tasmania was covered by another ten minute grid atlas. These detailed studies have been of great value to the fauna authorities in the places that were included in them and the Victorian Atlas is an extension of such pilot projects.

Two years ago the Fisheries and Wildlife Division of the Victorian Ministry for Conservation began to discuss with the RAOU the possibility of combining RAOU and Victorian Government data to produce a publication that showed the distribution of Victorian birds on a ten minute grid and correlated those distributions with the environmental data that was available in Victoria. The Ministry saw considerable benefit in this for its own planning and processes, particularly where these needed to assess the conservation value of unreserved land, both crown and privately owned.

For the project to go ahead efficiently the RAOU had to get its own data into a form that was easily accessible at Gladstone Street, integrate it with the data from the Ministry, produce combined maps on a ten minute grid and prepare a text to go with the maps that discussed the patterns of distribution. About eighteen months ago the RAOU was able to arrange grants from the Schutt Trust, a Victorian philanthropic foundation, to purchase the equipment it needed to store and print out the Atlas data in its own computer centre at RAOU headquarters. Simon Bennett was employed as the programmer to bring all the information together and make the system work. The fact that he has been able to do this is a tribute both to his competence and to the great development of micro computing technology in the last few years. When you consider that the Atlas data was collected and stored using a system that would only run on a machine that needed a large laboratory to house it, you will realise the advances that have had to be made to enable the data to be stored and used on a system that is housed in what was the bedroom of a suburban house.

Two officers of the Victorian Ministry of Conservation, Ian Norman and Bill Emison, are working with Simon and prepar-

ing the text of the Victorian Atlas. They are also supervising the coding (data entry and punching) of the Ministry data so that it can be combined with the RAOU data in a single set of maps. The project has been financially supported by the Ministry with a grant from the Commonwealth Community Employment Program. When it is published in 1985 Victoria will have a very detailed description of its birds that we hope will inspire other state Governments to support similar schemes. It is a good example of a project in which the RAOU, private funders and a government agency are working together to improve the conservation status of our birds.

Stephen Davies

## GROUND PARROT STUDY

The National Newsletter of March 1983 published the RAOU's first Conservation Statement which was on the Ground Parrot. The statement was written by Charles Meredith who has extensive experience with this bird species in the Eastern States. It concluded that the Ground Parrot had "suffered a significant reduction in range caused by clearing of its habitat." The statement went on to say that "all Western Australian populations urgently needed to be located, censused and studies . . .".

In Western Australia the Ground Parrot was once known to occur along the coast from north of Perth to Cape Arid. Now it is only known from small isolated populations along the south coast.

Following the publication of the Ground Parrot Conservation Statement, the Western Australian Department of Fisheries and Wildlife approached the RAOU with the view to conduct a survey of the distribution of this species in the south-west of WA. The study will commence in June and run until December. Doug Watkins has been appointed as Field Officer for the project and will be involved in extensive field work between July and October.

Members are urged to participate in this project. The greater the number of people that participate in the field work the more information that will be collected. Some valuable work has already been done by Brenda and Keith Newbey on the populations north of the Fitzgerald River National Park and in Cape Arid National Park.

A letter will be sent to members in June giving more details on the study and how to participate in it. In the meantime Doug would be very pleased to hear from members who have seen Ground Parrots in the south-west.

## THE WADER STUDY GROUP

### Report on the 1983/1984 banding season and other activities

It is with some embarrassment that I look at the data collected this year and sit down to write this report, as it hasn't been the most successful of seasons on the wader-banded front. The total number of waders caught is less than half that achieved last season, which is at least partly due to the fact that we went netting only 15 times. The reduced level of netting (compared to 25 times last season) was mainly the result of key people having other things to do, mundane activities such as earning a living, for example. However, the low number of birds caught can't be blamed entirely on lack of effort on our part, as when we did go out, the birds often weren't even there or they weren't getting caught like they used to! Numbers of the most common migratory waders — Red-necked Stint and Curlew Sandpiper — were lower than last season, and unusually windy conditions at Pelican Point made mist-netting difficult.

We attempted cannon-netting only once, on October 6 at the Como Foreshore, and this yielded 217 birds; nearly half our season's catch! Two hundred and sixteen of these were Red-necked Stints, the odd bird being a rather surprised Red-capped Plover, and such a large sample of Stints early in the season was useful in that it confirmed the impression we had gained from last season that adult Stints arrived before first years (juveniles). One hundred and ninety-three of the Stints were adults, 14 were



