



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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## A STORM OF PETRELS

Many readers will be aware of the appearance of hundreds of dead and dying seabirds along the coast of the South-West during the first week in August, 1984. So many people were discovering weak, dying or dead seabirds on the beaches, streets and gardens of Perth that media coverage was inevitable. Through the auspices of radio, television news and our regular newspaper journalist Alex Harris, the plight of the birds and the interest of the RAOU in the phenomenon were given good publicity (see page 1 of *The West Australian*, 9 August 1984).

Exhausted or dead albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters are found on or near beaches in the south of W.A. (and indeed the continent) every winter. Loss of these few individuals probably has little impact on the populations of seabirds feeding at sea off our south and west coasts. A Blue Petrel *Halobaena caerulea* found on 28 July on Rockingham Beach by Peter Wilmot was probably an example of the usual winter mortality of seabirds.

Of course, living seabirds are frequently seen from fishing boats, off Rottnest Island, from the Rottnest ferries or even adjacent to the shore of the mainland (eg. two Wilson's Storm Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus* at North Mole, Fremantle, on 9 July). Stormy weather, with W to SW winds provides conditions which bring seabirds into the viewing range of shore-based observers. Normally albatrosses, petrels and shearwaters feed many kilometres from land, sometimes concentrating near the continental shelf. They skim above the surface of the sea on stiff, bowed wings, drifting for long distances without needing to flap.

West to south-west winds buffeted the west coast of WA for more than four days in the first week in August. Particularly severe gales were associated with this weather system at more southerly latitudes and doubtless played a part in drawing large numbers of seabirds northwards to the SW of the continent.

Petrels caught up in these winds could not sustain their efforts to return to sea because the weather did not relent within a day or so, as it usually does. Unprecedented mortality subsequently occurred, though this would have been a little higher were it not for the patient efforts of 'emergency bird nursing homes' set up by bird-lovers in Perth.

One of the first fatalities was a Southern Giant-Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* found dead on South Street, Murdoch on 4 August. These birds are not uncommon off our coastline but are rarely seen eight kilometres inland!

On 6, 7, and 8 August, Blue Petrels and Kerguelen Petrels *Pterodroma neglecta* were seen flying between sand dunes near the West Coast Highway and dead or living birds were collected as far inland as Swan View and other hills localities. Telephones



This Antarctic Prion *Pachyptila desolata* was picked up on Friday 20 July at Woodman Point by Doug Nash. It was identified by Ron Johnstone from bill measurements. The 'M' pattern on the upperwing is common to all prions and the Blue Petrel, but the Blue Petrel is unique in having a white-tipped tail.

at the W.A. Museum and RAOU Office were busy with enquiries: quite a few residents of Perth had found a petrel on their street or front lawn!

Surveys of beaches by Sue Gordon, Roger Jaensch (RAOU) and John Roberts (Perth City Council) yielded the following results:

- 2 km, near Two Rocks: 24 Blue Petrels, 9 Kerguelen petrels, one prion (total = 34);
- 0.5 km, Mullaloo: 21 Blue Petrels, 8 Kerguelen Petrels, two 'broad-billed' prions, one 'thin-billed' prion (total = 32);
- 1.5 km, N. Fremantle: 18 Blue Petrels, one Kerguelen Petrel, three 'broad-billed' prions, one Cape Petrel (total = 23).

Total counted = 131 birds (mostly dead): 69% Blue Petrel, 24% Kerguelen Petrel, 5% prion species.

Prions could not always be identified with certainty due to the overlap in dimensions of bills and wings of the six widely recognized species. Most dead prions were rather decomposed, suggesting that they had been brought in by earlier storms. They, like many specimens, are being examined by staff at the W.A. Museum which now has an invaluable reference collection of seabirds from this event.

Only a few Blue and Kerguelen Petrels have been previously recovered from beaches of the South-West. There were no records of the Kerguelen Petrel from WA during the Atlas, and only one of the Blue Petrel. Twenty Kerguelens were recovered from the Coorong Beach in S.A. from 25-31 August 1981, while individuals were also recovered at inland S.A. localities after fierce southerly gales.

Both species of petrel breed on Kerguelen and Marion Islands; the Kerguelen Islands are 4000 km from Perth, near the Antarctic Convergence.

## 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. although the room is open from 7.30 p.m. It is often better to catch up with committee members and field officers before the meeting starts as they are frequently inundated by the requests of members at the conclusion of meetings. Visitors are especially welcome.

### 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 water-bird management in the U.K. and Netherlands. A number of WA Group members generously supported his recent tour.

A brief report on *Interwader '83* might also be presented. 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.

### Monday, January 14, Annual Meeting

Wine and cheese will probably precede this important event, the venue for which is to be announced in the December newsletter. Come along to exercise your vote and hear how the W.A. Group progressed over the past year.

## 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: two have passed (Torbay, Rotto) and two are outlined below.

Newcomers are always welcome at excursions and campouts and more experienced bird-watchers are only too pleased to assist with identification of unfamiliar birds.

### Special Waterbird Survey — September 6-7: Gingilup Swamps

The Gingilup Swamps Nature Reserve is a large area of heath and rush swamps about which very little is known. A brief account of the area appeared in *SWANS* Vol 12, No 1 (1982). We suspect that it may be an important area for bitterns and rails.

A two day expedition will commence from **Alexandra Bridge at 11.00 a.m. on Thursday 6 September**. The overnight camp will be in the vicinity of Scott River and campers will need to be self-sufficient.

Any observers interested in joining our survey team are encouraged to contact Roger Jaensch at the RAOU Office.

### CAMPOUT — September 8-9: Northcliffe and Windy Harbour

We are awaiting confirmation of the exact site for this outdoor campout, but we expect to be able to use a bush area near Northcliffe. One objective will be to listen for **Ground Parrots** calling in the evenings, on heathy flats between Northcliffe and the coast. Some observers may join the campout after searching the Gingilup Swamps for waterbirds on September 6-7.

If you are interested in joining the campout, contact or leave a message for **Doug Watkins** at the RAOU Office. You will be notified about the meeting place and camp site as soon as possible. Please note that enthusiasm is the only ingredient needed for Ground Parrot searching!

### 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 — Friday September 28 to Monday October 1: Dryandra Forest and Narrogin Lakes

RAOU members and friends will be joining the **WA Naturalists' Club** (but not the B.O.C.) at Dryandra Village on the long weekend this year. People should come self-sufficient for camping (some water may be available) although limited accommodation in Nissan huts could be available: check with Mike Southwell-Keely (Ph 295 1441) if you require this.

Dryandra Forest is renowned for its variety of woodland birds including Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens, Crested Shrike-tits, Mallee-fowls and raptors. Nesting could be in full swing at this time. Twelve open Canadian canoes have been hired and will be used on the Narrogin Lakes (e.g. Taarblin) on the Monday. The lakes support many breeding ducks (including Freckled Ducks), herons and egrets. A small fee will be required from those using the canoes.

Dryandra Forest is easily reached on bitumen road from North Bannister, via **Wandering** and Pumphrey's Bridge. The village is off the main road but is signposted. If you get to Narrogin you have gone too far. Most local people will know the area quite well.

### Special Waterbird Survey No. 2 — Tuesday October 2: Beverley (Yenyening) Lakes

Following the Dryandra Campout, some observers will search the Beverley Lakes chain for nesting waterbirds. This wetland area is the subject of conflict between several interests and more bird data is needed to enable appropriate management decisions to be made.

Meet at 9.00 a.m. at the **Brookton Post Office**; the lakes are 25-30 km to the east. A convenient route back to Perth would be the Brookton Highway.

### Sunday, October 14: Alfred Cove

This place is famous for its nesting Buff-banded Rails and Black-winged Stilts as well as hordes of waders including the oc-

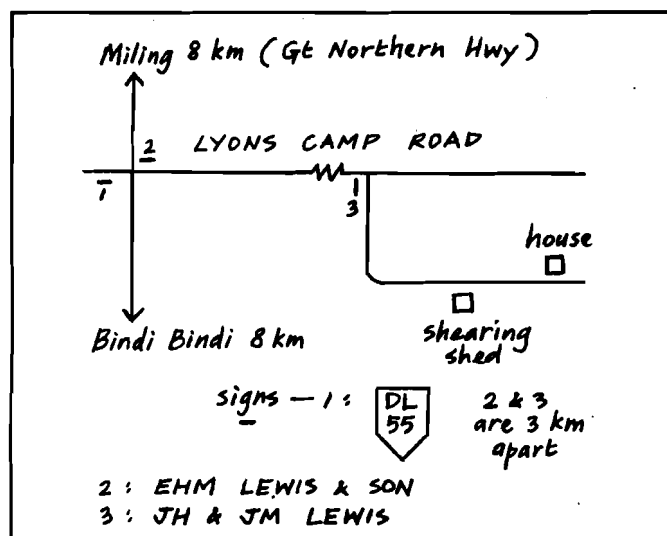
casional Terek Sandpiper, Sittellas and Tree Martins nest in the eucalypts in the parking area near Troy Park where observers should meet at 2.00 p.m. You might care to first join a B.Y.O. barbecue at 12 noon at the hill-top playground at Wireless Hill.

#### Weekend Camp - October 20-21: Miling, Moora, Wongan Hills

This campout will be based in the shearing shed at the property of J.H. & J.M. Lewis, about 8 km SE of Miling and 200 km North of Perth. Water, light, shelter and possibly a sheep on the spit on Saturday night, will be provided. Otherwise come self-sufficient (beds, food etc.); camping is permitted.

Saturday morning will be spent in an area 40 km north of the farm, where mulga bird species have been seen. The afternoon will see us investigating excellent wetlands west of Moora, also about 40 km from the farm.

Departure times from the farm will be 9.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. (Sat.) and 9.00 a.m. on Sunday for a return to Perth via Wongan Hills. Wildflowers will certainly be fantastic. **Organiser:** R. Van Delft, 364 6202.



#### Weekend Camp — November 3-4: Woodanilling

The highly successful 1983 visit to the woodland and lakes near Woodanilling will be repeated in similar fashion. **Ray Garstone** is happy to help us with his local knowledge and skills at nest-finding. Camp will be set up in the Woodanilling Sports Ground area, which is where we will assemble on Saturday November 3 at 9.00 a.m. and later at 2.00 p.m.

#### Special Waterbird Survey No. 3 — November 5-6:

##### Muir Lakes Complex

The numerous wetlands in the Muir Lakes Nature Reserve are not well known by ornithologists. Observers interested in discovering what birds use these lakes and swamps should assemble at 10.00 a.m. at the north end of Lake Muir (near the culvert/bridge on Muir's Highway) on Monday, November 5. A bush camp will be set up on Monday night: bring gas cooking equipment and 'swamp clothing' in addition to your food and accommodation.

#### Weekend Camp — November 17-18: Karakin/Samphire/Gingin

Meet at 8.30 a.m. on Saturday, November 17 at the Moore River bridge on the Perth-Lancelin Highway (about one hour from Perth). We will look in coastal heath for the Emu-wren and Calamanthus and then count waterbirds at Karakin Lake (levels permitting).

Overnight camping area and water are available at Samphire Bird Sanctuary, Wanerie Road, West Gingin. Variety of bush and waterbirds (sometimes nesting spoonbills; Little Bittern). On Sunday meet at 9.00 a.m. on the Brand Highway at the left turn which is 2-3 km North of Bootine Road. If you hope to join us on the Sunday only, advise **Di Beckingham** on 381 9035.

#### Saturday, November 24: Woodman Point

Meet at 0800 at the most westerly car-parking area at Woodman Point. This is an important roost site for migratory waders.

#### Metro Bird Tally 1984: November 30 — December 1

This year's bird tally will emulate the 1983 event except that it will be limited to the area within a radius of 30 km from the G.P.O. It will run from 6.00 pm (1800) on Friday November 30, to 6.00 p.m. on the following Saturday (culminating in the Social night).

Those who would like to take part in the tally should contact **Ron Van Delft** at the R.A.O.U. office by November 20. A charge of \$2 per team will be made to cover postage of instructions and tally cards.

The objective of the tally is to record the bird species present in the metropolitan area within a twenty-four hour period, at a particular time of year.

#### ANNUAL SOCIAL NIGHT: Saturday December 1 — W.A.I.T.

Last year's social night was a huge success and we feel it's worth another round in the same format. The night will begin at 6.00 p.m. and will be an outdoor wine/nibbles/BBQ/fruit salad affair. Some prizes will be given out and results from the Bird Tally will be announced.

The cost per adult will be \$11.00 payable to the R.A.O.U. (send to R.A.O.U. office) by 15 November at the very latest. School age children will be admitted for \$6.00 per head.

The W.A.I.T. campus will again be the venue although you might need to follow our signs from the Kent Street (western) entrance in case we choose a different site to that used in 1983. Will you be amongst the revellers?

#### Sunday, December 16: lower Swan River valley

Details to be finalised in December newsletter, but probably meet at 0800 at the carpark in the Clarkson Reserve, off the end of Peninsula Rd., Maylands. Check with the R.A.O.U. Office.

#### Events in 1985

Unfortunately, no events for 1985 have been programmed in sufficient detail to announce here. We have, however, tentatively booked the Woodbury Boston facilities at Torbay for the long weekend of January 25-28, 1985. Please ring **Di Beckingham** on 381 9035 to give an indication of interest in participating.

## MEETING REPORTS

#### May 7: Discussion Evening

More than 50 members and friends heard reports of bird study projects in W.A. **Shapelle McNee** presented data collected for the Australasian Shoveler by participants in the Waterbird Usage Study; **Mike Bamford** illustrated wader banding work and gave an analysis of some data from Pelican Point; **Graeme Folley** talked about Noisy Scrub-birds; and **Steve Keeling** discussed the Clamorous Reed Warbler and Little Grassbird with the use of sketches and data.

Ensuing discussion included the study projects as well as the Annual Bird Report, Atlas launch, book sales and excursions.

#### June 25: Mike Brooker — Kakadu

Brief reports and announcements from many sources revealed the healthy state of activities of the W.A. group to the 100+ people at this meeting. **Mike Brooker** spoke of monitoring of flora and fauna which he and others from C.S.I.R.O. undertook in the Kakadu National Park (N.T.). This region bears some similarities to parts of the Kimberley, many bird species being common to both areas. Fire plays an important role in woodland areas. These appear rather different in the wet and dry seasons.

#### August 6: Ground Parrots/Discussion

**Geoff Shannon** chaired this meeting of 65 people, at which **Barbara Hale** was elected chairman of the W.A. group of the R.A.O.U. **Doug Watkins** played recordings of calls of the Ground Parrot (**J. Hutchinson's** tape) and spoke of the results of his work and plans for the coming months. **Stephen Davies** explained the background to the pricing system for the Atlas and **Roger Jaensch** detailed three special waterbird survey efforts coming up in spring.

## EXCURSION REPORTS

### May 6: Neerabup National Park and swamps near the Yanchep Road

About 35 people braved the strong cold north-easterly winds to meet at Joondalup Lake and hope for improved weather conditions. A walk along the shores of Joondalup rewarded us with sightings of Australasian Shoveler, Great Egret, Sacred Ibis and other common waterfowl. A large number of Tree Martins were noticed roosting or hiding from the wind in a small patch of Typha.

The party then travelled onto the Neerabup National Park which is a fine example of open Tuart woodland. Strong winds and light rain meant very few species were seen, but the highlight was seeing a Pacific Heron flying south for the winter!

We then went onto Neerabup Swamp to examine the presence or absence of Argentine ants, as the swamp had been sprayed by the APB some months ago. Fortunately no Argentine ants were found. Observers dispersed around the swamp and some people had great fun tramping through the swamp, flushing birds for the birds relaxing on a high point near the swamp! Only Purple Swampheens were flushed, but the Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel were also noted hovering overhead. Overall it was an enjoyable day.

Thanks to Stephen Davies and Doug Watkins for leading us.

Ron Van Delft

### June 9: Wannamal and Guraga Lakes

The limited area of safe parking space at Chittering Lake prevented our convoy of 17 cars (44 persons) from looking for Freckled Ducks at that wetland. Nevertheless, Wannamal Lake provided 16 species of waterbirds, including two Great Crested Grebes and 48 Blue-billed Ducks.

Bushbirds were active in the River Gums and Melaleucas beside Wannamal Lake. Highlights included calling Pallid Cuckoos, a shy Fan-tailed Cuckoo, three Sacred Kingfishers, Restless Flycatchers and a female Golden Whistler. A Barn Owl was flushed from a tree-hole and five regal Wedge-tailed Eagles drifted over the tree-tops.

After a sumptuous lunch in the balmy sunshine at Regan's Ford, the entourage assembled at the head of the firebreak leading to Guraga Lake. Being warned of the perils of the sandy track, most drivers reached the lake without difficulty.

Rafts of Hoary-headed Grebes, Musk Ducks and Blue-billed Ducks swam on the placid waters of the lake, while 15 Yellow-billed Spoonbills swept the shallows for small items of food. Unexpected inhabitants of the islets and spits included 19 Curlew Sandpipers, 41 Red-necked Stints and four Grey Plovers. A total of 21 species of waterbirds were seen as well as a variety of passerines in the Banksia/Acacia scrub.

The passage of a dozen vehicles had left the exit route in difficult condition, with the result that most vehicles became bogged while leaving the lake. Our thanks to the 4WD people who helped out, and apologies to those who were late for appointments as a result of their off-road experience!

Altogether one of the W.A. Group's most memorable excursions.

R.J.

### July 6-9: Rottnest Retreat, 1984

A total of 42 urgent birders invaded Rotto from 6 to 9 July. After establishing a beachhead and securing an impressive quantity of provisions — vast rounds of bread and gallons of vino — we were off and running.

The following extracts are taken from the Rotto RAOU diary.

"I encountered extreme heights of emotional and physical transformation — better than Luna Park or Disneyland" M. Sharp.

"Damage Report — While serving above and beyond the call of duty on muttonbird patrol, Peter Watkins suffered a sprained ankle when he fell into a hole left by an inconsiderate muttonbird. Alas, no bird was found! Pete suffered on crutches for the whole weekend — grounded!"

"So now we've come to Rotto — we've come to join the quokkas just like other 'yobbo ockers', and we'll harass the snakes around these Rotto lakes, counting Phalaropes in scores — as we sleep — in spite of snores . . . We'll do it all, and more" Di Beckingham.

Many thanks to everyone who took part in what turned out to be another wonderful RAOU weekend. Particular mention must go to the R.I.B. education officer Tom Perrigo for his interest, not only in the future of the RAOU on the Island but also for arranging the video which enabled us to show the RSPB films 'Seabirds' and 'The Osprey'.

Thanks also to Shapelle McNee for all her work in getting people organized and Norma Duff and Di Beckingham who looked after the cleaning of the huts.

Special bird sightings on Rotto were a Sea-Eagle (Nicholas Dixon), a Hobby (Geoff Shannon), the Grey Fantail (Bill and Karen McRoberts), two Willie Wagtails (B. & K. McRoberts) and the Rainbow Bee-eater (Norma Duff). The Hobby was possibly a first for the Island. A total of 53 species was tallied from three days of observation, compared with 59 species from ten days in 1983.

P.S. Well done Geoff Shannon for enduring the sea-crossing, and thanks to Nick Dunlop for his talk on terns and for organizing the banding sessions.

S. Keeling

### July 28: Bickley Brook

A gathering of about 50 people scored the slopes above the babbling brook, hoping to find or hear birds in the flowering heath. Stephen Davies and seven other experienced observers were able to point out 43 species to the many newcomers. Four species of cuckoo were recorded as well as both whistlers and three species of thornbill. Nesting appeared to be in the minds of the Magpie-larks and Grey Butcherbirds.

The highlight for the day was the discovery of two Southern Emu-wrens on the south slope of the valley. This diminutive species is rarely recorded from the Darling Scarp (eg. John Forrest), perhaps through lack of observations or lack of familiarity with the fine calls of this bird.

## FROM YOUR COMMITTEE

### 1. New Chairman.

Nominations for the position of Chairman of the W.A. Group of the RAOU, left vacant by the resignation of Dr Stephen Davies, were called for at the June general meeting. The name of **Barbara Hale** was put forward and Barbara was duly elected at the August general meeting.

The committee and members of the W.A. Group wish Barbara every success in this role and offer her whatever means of support they can provide.

### 2. Staff at Eyre Bird Observatory.

Assistant Warden Jill Smith is temporarily absent due to requirements for the completion of her studies in N.S.W. Volunteer assistant wardens will fill this vacancy, viz. **Syd Baker, Tom Delaney and Rodney Vervest.**

**New overnight fees** are to apply: \$17 for RAOU members and \$20 for non-members. The Eyre Report for 1982 - 1983 is in advanced stages of preparation.

### 3. Membership.

The number of members of the RAOU in W.A. in July was **442** (possibly a little less due to non-renewals of subscriptions).

#### 4. From Sub-committees.

Important recommendations of sub-committees, accepted by the General Committee included the following:

- a. an annual subscription of \$6 p.a. will be required in 1985 for receipt of *W.A. Bird Notes*: it was felt that members would recognize the value of this publication and appreciate the high costs of production (not to be met by the Waterbird Project after 1985);
- b. a vetting committee would consider all bird records to be published in the *1983 Bird Report for W.A.*;
- c. the finances of the W.A. Group are limited, and as such, no additional commitments of expenditure can be undertaken in the near future.

#### 5. Noticeboards at Booragoon and Blue Gum Lakes.

Ron Van Delft and the City of Melville have produced display boards of waterbirds at these two metropolitan wetlands. Material can be readily altered and gives good publicity for the RAOU.

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

It was 16th June when I finally reached Eyre, having been delayed in U.K. by emigration bureaucracy. Assistant Wardens Peter Higgins and Jill Smith had arrived three weeks earlier and had benefitted greatly from their overlap period with Peter and Di Congreve. They learnt much of the routine operation of the establishment and also many of the idiosyncracies about which it can be vital to know.

During the long drive down from Perth with Peter and Di, towing their enormous removals-trailer, I was able to fire at them 101 questions concerning Eyre. Then there were just three hectic days of packing and load-carrying out to the Microwave Tower before we were waving farewell and wishing them a safe journey and a long, happy and less-demanding retirement at Beverley.

Since then it has been a period of settling in and reorganisation, with some minor repairs and improvements in and around the building and a fair amount of exploration of the observatory area. Excursions have been made to Twilight Cove, to the end of the east track and to Burnabbie Homestead and beyond. A party of five Ground Cuckoo-shrikes near Burnabbie were noteworthy.

Our mist-netting operations have been limited by a lack of poles and guy-cord, by one or more nets being on the mending-box throughout and not least by the wind and rain. The rain, of course, is always welcome and both our surface tanks are full, with several feet in the underground tank as well. We have used some of Peter's established net-sites, found several good new ones and several more fruitless ones: the haul to date is a meagre 48 banded and 24 retraps, with a Striated Pardalote being the most unusual capture.

Weekly mallee transects have been somewhat tentative as none of us are fully tuned in to the variety of calls that emanate from our passerine community. Nevertheless, we are learning fast and the extremely high-pitched contact note of the Chestnut Quail-thrushes is revealing that they are common in the areas of mallee that we have ventured into so far.

Undoubtedly the beach and the ocean have been the most productive habitats recently. The weekly count of 13.6 km of Kanidal Beach has produced very few waders as such. In breezy conditions on 9th July we recorded an all-time low count of just 13 Red-capped Plovers: presumably most had taken to the less wind-swept sand flats behind the shore dunes.

However, on 1st July near Nine-mile Hut, alongside four Crested Terns resting on the seaweed was an immature Common Tern, a new species for Eyre. Next day, returning from Twilight Cove, we found a freshly dead Antarctic Prion. A week later fresh onshore winds made sea-watching a profitable exercise, with five certain Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and many others too distant for positive identification, as well as a Southern Skua (another new species for Eyre) close inshore eating what later proved to

be a prion. Two further beach-washed prions were recovered, one Antarctic and one Slender-billed.

On 12th July another Southern Skua was seen. A Short-tailed Shearwater was swimming just beyond the surf and it occasionally flew around before eventually heading out to sea. A beach-washed Little Penguin was also found.

On 4th July I spotted a Little Eagle from the verandah, the first here for two years, when driving out on 7th Jill had prolonged views of a Malleefowl and when returning from Cocklebidy in fading light on 8th July, Peter and I had the good fortune to see 40 Dusky Wood-swallows clustering at their roosting tree.

It is too soon for us to comment on the abundance of honeyeaters though I suspect they are at a low ebb at present as very little eucalypt is in flower, but in some areas the trees are very heavily laden with bud, boding well for the spring and summer.

Last but not least, mention must be made of our new solar energy unit, which arrived in May, preceding all three of us. Its journey in from Madura along 60 km of hard track and 10 km of soft track took seven days, including nearly four days bogged down in sand in the newly-named 'Death Valley'. This necessitated summoning the expensive aid of a heavy Steiger tractor, which also managed to get stuck.

However, after much jacking-up, pushing, pulling and general perseverance, and some degree of rearrangement of our track, the unit was finally delivered. Installation was simple and we have much-appreciated silent power each evening, with only very minor teething problems. We hope everyone will come and see it for themselves.

There are vacancies on all the spring courses and plenty of quiet periods besides, so we are looking forward to welcoming everyone down here in due course. Why not give us a call?

Nick Dymond, Warden.

## GROUND PARROTS

How is the Ground Parrot Study going? I knew you were going to ask that question, so read on.

The first two months of the project have now flown past. I have made two field trips and have been successful in locating Ground Parrots in Cape Arid National Park and in an area of Vacant Crown Land north of the Fitzgerald River National Park. Several other sites were visited but time spent at these sites was insufficient to yield results.

Field work to date has been of a preliminary nature with the intensive stage commencing in August. The dates and areas of field work are:

7 Aug — 15 Aug	.....	Cape Arid to Hopetoun
19 Aug — 30 Aug	.....	Albany to Walpole
3 Sept — 16 Sept	.....	Walpole to Augusta
29 Sept — 21 Oct	.....	Hopetoun to Albany
27 Oct — 3 Nov	.....	East of Esperance

Specific sites and dates cannot be given because these depend on the results of the field work.

The most productive method for locating Ground Parrots is to listen just before dawn and after dusk for their calls. Their call is quite loud and distinctive. In Cape Arid National Park I heard at least 10 Ground Parrots calling while I stood at one spot. To assist members in the identification of the call, a tape is being prepared. On completion of the tape copies will be sent to all that are interested in doing some 'Ground Parrotting'. Included with the tape will be details on how to maximize your chances of locating some Ground Parrots.

Although several remarks have been made about the size of my ears, they are limited in their ability to listen to all of the South Coast. The Ground Parrot Study needs your ears! (Cold?) If your ears are not doing much and the rest of your body is willing to go along, come and do some 'Ground Parrotting' for a day or two.

Interested members can contact me by writing to or phoning the RAOU Office. I get back to it about every three weeks so I must apologise if some replies are delayed.

G.P.O. Watkins

# The Atlas Launch

## 18 July 1984

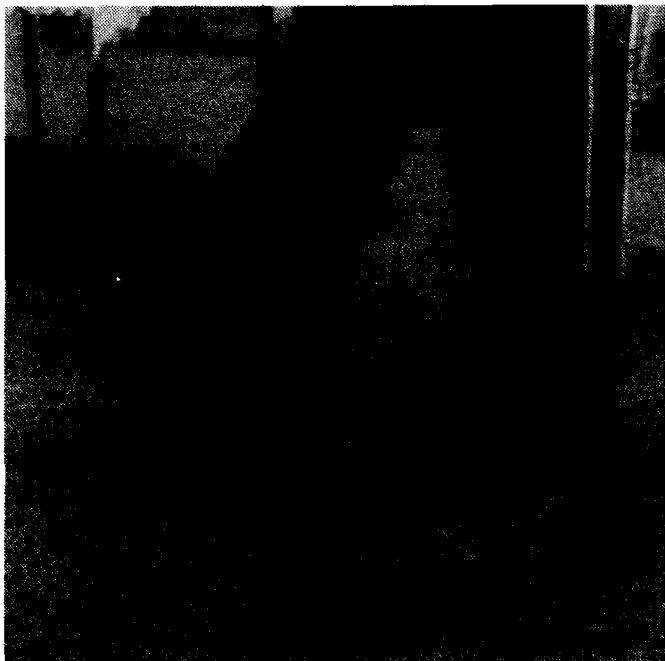
in the Undercroft of Winthrop Hall University of Western Australia



It was certainly a convivial occasion! Capable overseers of catering arrangements, John Malcolm and Diane Beckingham.



Immaculately posed: L to R, Dr. Stephen Davies, Wendy Davies, Mrs. Reid and the Governor, Professor Gordon Reid.



Physical disabilities did not prevent Atlassers from attending the Launch, a highlight in the annals of the W.A. Group of the R.A.O.U.



The expression is classical, even if the focus isn't! Peter Congreve and Edna Milne.

Refer also to a report in the RAOU National Newsletter.

Photos by R. Jaensch



