



Western Australian Bird Notes

NUMBER 32
DECEMBER 1984

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

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in W.A.:**

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BIRDING BY BOAT

THE FIRST FREMANTLE TO SHELF BOAT TRIP IN SEARCH OF PELAGIC SEABIRDS

Very early on 23 September, thirteen intrepid members and friends embarked at the fishing boat harbour in Fremantle. This was an historic occasion to seek out our little-known offshore seabirds beyond the usual limits of observation. With the mercury heading for about 20°C and the swell rising to nearly half a metre, we were obviously going to need true grit to persevere with our seawatching and resist the temptation to stretch out in the balmy sun.

Undoubtedly, the highlights of the day were the noisy groups of young Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and Fleshy-footed Shearwaters that fed a few metres from the boat, when we stopped some 12 miles (nautical ones, of course) and 100 fathoms (remember those?) west of Rottnest. The birds appeared out of an empty ocean as if by magic and they in turn attracted that full-time mugger of the high seas, the Great Skua. Least expected birds of the day were two Hutton's Shearwaters that wheeled and twisted south across our bow (pointy end) while we were about 1km NE of West End. I know of no previous sightings of live birds in Perth waters, but this adds evidence to the idea that *huttoni* regularly move down and around the west coast of the continent in late winter (see S.A. Halse, *EMU* 81:42-44).

Despite the high cost of a day's charter, the success of the day made it a memorable one. The trip would not have taken place if it had not been for Steve Keeling's persistence in drumming up support at short notice. Seabird-watching trips have been running from various eastern states centres for some time now and some of their 'good' days have brought forth an extraordinary range of exciting seabirds, many of which can be observed with stunning clarity and at point-blank range. Having now got out there and done it, I have no doubt this will be the first of many such trips.

Peter Curry

OFF TO THE ABROLHOS

On the weekend of 27-28 October, nine intrepid birdos set out to discover the delights of Pelsart Island, a long narrow strip of coral rubble in the southern group of the Houtman Abrolhos. The trip began poorly with several people spending anxious hours driving around Geraldton in the small hours of the morning looking for the wharf (it's down by the ocean — you can't miss it!). Eventually all boarded the *Southern Lady* and attempted to



A nest of the Malleefowl was inspected during the campout with the Naturalists' Club, at Dryandra Forest.
Photograph by Bert and Babs Wells.

catch a few hours sleep on her gently swaying deck.

Sleep was thwarted shortly before dawn by the roar of engines and, in some cases, a liberal dose of salt water, but the excitement of actually being on our way kept our spirits up. Attitudes changed slightly under the combined influence of a heavy southerly swell, diesel fumes and lack of sleep. After three hours at sea and then ten minutes in a dinghy, we were on Pelsart.

Birdlife observed included no less than seven Ospreys, a juvenile White-breasted Sea-Eagle with mum and dad and Common and Lesser Noddies. Fairy, Roseate, Bridled, Sooty, Crested and Caspian Terns, Spotless Crakes and assorted waders were also seen. All birds were remarkably friendly, and also notable for their tameness were the resident King's Skinks (*Egernia kingii*), which found our imported fruit scones much to their liking. Bridled Terns had to be pushed off the verandah of the shack we spent the night in!

The seas were kinder on the return voyage; or had we got our sea-legs? Seen between the islands and the mainland were Yellow-nosed Albatrosses, countless Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, White-faced Storm-Petrels and a probable Hutton's Shearwater. The bird-list for the trip contained only about 30 species, but all agreed that it was "quality stuff".

Mike Bamford

COMING MEETINGS

Meetings commence at 8.00pm, although the meeting room is usually open from 7.30pm. It is often best to catch up with committee members and project officers before the meeting starts as they are more often inundated by the requests of members at the conclusion of meetings. Visitors are especially welcome.

Monday, 14th January: Annual General Meeting.

This will be held at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, corner Selby Street and Pearson Drive at 8.00pm and it should be an interesting night for all. Note that all positions on the Committee for 1985 fall vacant at the AGM. Therefore we need nominations for Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and six extra members.

Start thinking about who you would like to see on the Committee and come along to have your say on how the WA Group will run in 1985.

Monday, 25th February: Special Meeting — Nick Dymond

Our Warden from Eyre Bird Observatory will speak about his experiences with observatories and wardening in the UK. The meeting will be held at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, commencing at 8.00pm. All welcome.

Unfortunately, topics and speakers have not been finalised for the two following meetings. We are also looking for a suitable venue. Please check the March 1985 issue of this newsletter for details.

Monday 25th March:

This will be our normal March meeting and we hope to have another lucrative speaker to captivate the usual large crowd.

Monday 6th May:

Discussion/Study meeting.

COMING EXCURSIONS AND CAMPOUTS

Excursions and campouts are directed toward both country and metropolitan localities and aim to provide experience in bird recognition and appreciation to both members and newcomers. Information gathered on the day is often used for specific management or educational purposes.

Interested newcomers are always welcome at any event and experienced birdwatchers are only too pleased to assist with identification of unfamiliar birds.

Codes MBP = part of the programme of the Metropolitan Bird Project, organised by Project Officer, Ron Van Delft.
MBP/RAOU = joint excursion of MBP and RAOU.
SWS = Special Waterbird Survey, organised by Field Officer, Roger Jaensch.

Note: Details for events after 10th March will appear in the March 1985 issue of this newsletter: look out for any changes.

Sunday, December 9: Wanneroo Shire (MBP)

Meet at 2.00pm at Neil Hawkins Reserve, which is a picnic area near the Wanneroo Shire Offices beside Joondalup Lake. The MBP aims to promote awareness of birds in the metro area through monthly bird walks.

Sunday, December 16: Lower Swan River Valley

Meet at 8.00am at the carpark in Clarkson Road (off the end of Peninsula Road, Maylands) nearest the city. We hope to see White-winged Fairy-wrens while looking at remnant wetlands in the Swan Valley.

Sunday, January 13: Forrestdale Lake (MBP/RAOU)

Meet at 8.00am at the picnic area at the end of Moore Street (formerly at the end of Broome Street) in Forrestdale. We should see quite a few waders and possibly some crakes.

Sunday, January 20: Lake Gwelup (MBP)

Meet at 2.00pm at the intersection of Lagonda Drive and March Street in Gwelup. Occasionally Little Egrets on this wetland.

Friday, January 25-Monday, January 28: Torbay Campout

We return to the Woodbury-Boston Environmental School near Torbay Hill between Albany and Denmark. Our programme will probably be similar to that of 1984, but the birding in diverse habitats is always rewarding. Please ring the Office to book a place, as this is essential. The cost is \$12 and only food and sleeping bags need be taken as the hall is fully equipped and there are dormitories.

Directions:

FROM ALBANY — take the Elleker/Torbay road to Denmark. After Elleker and Cosy Corner Road turn LEFT on HORTINS SOUTH ROAD. Turn right at the first T-Junction and continue for a total of 3.5km from the Denmark road, ignoring two bitumen turnoffs to the right. At the top of the climb note the Woodbury-Boston sign.

FROM DENMARK — take the Torbay bitumen alternative route to Albany and find the Hortins South Road after Bornholm.

Saturday, January 26: Wetlands of the Shire of Gingin

For those not travelling to Torbay, meet at 8.00am at the junction of the Brand Highway and Bamban Road, which is signposted on the highway about 10km south of Gingin. A great variety of birds occurs in this area, e.g. Darters, Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Blue-billed Ducks.

Saturday, February 9: Kings Park and Pelican Point (MBP/RAOU)

Meet in the carpark overlooking the Narrows, west of the statue of Forrest, at 4.30pm. White-cheeked Honeyeaters and waders.

Saturday, March 2-Sunday, March 3: Goodale Sanctuary Campout and McLarty or Mealup Lake

From Pinjarra, travel for approximately 6km southwards on the South-Western Highway, turning right into the Old Bunbury Road (bitumen). Follow the bitumen for approximately 10km to a crossroad which is signposted 'Herron Point' and 'Fisherman's Road': do not take either alternative but make a U-turn and retreat towards Pinjarra until you see the first (angled) gravel road on the left. Follow this road around a sharp bend, to the ridge with scrub on both sides. Look for the Sanctuary entrance on the right. If you cross an open plain you have gone too far. The campsite is in a cleared strip well into the scrub along the dirt track.

Campers need to be fully self-sufficient and should carry gas cooking equipment. Please respect this attractive bush area.

Rally at 0900 at the campsite for the organised activities on both days. A visit to the rich McLarty-Mealup area on Saturday should yield waders, herons and Regent Parrots, while the Sanctuary supports a vigorous breeding colony of Darters and an elusive Black Bittern.

Sunday, March 10: Bibra and Yangebup Lakes

Always a popular excursion. Meet at 8.00am at the log-boat on the lawns on the western side of Bibra Lake.

Sunday, March 30: Dumbleyung Lake (SWS)

Consult Roger Jaensch at RAOU office.

Saturday, April 13: Whiteman Park, Caversham (MBP/RAOU)

Saturday, April 20: Day boat trip to Continental Shelf

This excursion is run through the WA Seabird Group of the RAOU, but all are welcome. You must book by March 20 at the RAOU office in WA. A booking fee of \$20 is required and the

total cost is expected to be about \$30. Of special interest will be those species which are present as a result of the plankton blooms which should occur at this time of year. Enquiries to Steve Keeling on 291 7592.

Sunday, April 29: Coo loongup Lake

Sunday, May 5: John Forrest National Park

Monday, May 13: Peel Inlet (SWS)

Saturday, May 25: Chittering Valley

MEETING REPORTS

September 24: Roger Jaensch — Ornithology in Japan, England and The Netherlands

Bird-watching in Japan is booming in popularity, and activities and sanctuaries are highly organised (e.g. rows of telescopes in hides). Wetlands are scarce but are used by small mobs of wintering ducks (e.g. Falcated Teal) and waders (e.g. Long-billed Plover). Impressive birds readily seen in the mountains and northern parts include the Brown Dipper, Mandarin Duck and Steller's Sea-Eagle. Wader banding is organised in Tokyo Bay and cranes are trapped on the south-western islands. The English language field guide is excellent and is available in Australia.

Hong Kong surprisingly offers a great deal for birdos. Blue Magpies and Violet Whistling-thrushes abound in the mainland parks, while impressive colonies of egrets and Pond-Herons, roosting waders (e.g. Spotted Redshank), marsh-birds and ducks (e.g. Garganey) can be observed near the Chinese border. The latest edition of the Hong Kong Bird Guide is very good.

Bird studies and reserves have long been established in England, so it should not be surprising that management of wetlands for waterbirds is quite advanced. Highlights of wetlands in The Netherlands include the vast Wadden Sea, and reed swamps managed for nesting by Curlews and Bitterns as well as thatch production. Black-tailed Godwits and Oystercatchers nest extensively in cow pastures!

EXCURSION REPORTS

August 11: Herdsman Lake

Stephen Davies was assisted by a number of experienced birdos in presenting the birds of Herdsman Lake to a crowd of 65, many from Stephen's course at UWA. Nearly 30 species were seen, including the Great Crested Grebe, Brown Goshawk, White-backed Swallow and Chestnut-breasted Mannikin. Ducks, swans and Little Grassbirds were nesting.

August 18: Yanchep

Forty-four species were noted by participants in this excursion, again led by Stephen Davies. Nesting by Purple Swamphears, Red Wattlebirds and Striated Pardalote was observed: trillers were also seen. The assemblage split into three groups to visit the banding station run by Geoff Shannon, Perry de Rebeira and Peter Watkins. Fifty-nine birds were caught, seven having been banded previously (up to three years ago). The catch included three Little Wattlebirds, two Western Spinebills and a Spotted Pardalote (first caught in the Park).

September 8-9: Northcliffe

Foul weather hampered the faithful who listened, in vain, for Ground Parrots in the Windy Harbour-Broke Inlet region. Shearwaters and Yellow-nosed Albatrosses were spied off the lighthouse at Point D'Entrecasteaux and Purple-crowned Lorikeets could be heard in the misty canopies of karri at Mount Chudalup.

September 15: Avon National Park Excursion

A group of about 30 people braved an adverse weather forecast to gather at Gidgegannup before moving onto the National Park.



Shining Bronze-Cuckoos were observed on the Yanchep excursion and a juvenile was being fed by foster parents during the Woodanilling Campout.

Photograph by Geoff Shannon.

The day started well with a Pied Butcherbird calling near the assembly point, but the rest of the excursion constituted more glimpses than clear sightings. A 'young at heart' group descended the thousand feet from the park lookout to the river in search of different habitat and bird life, but was not rewarded in anything much but hard toil in the thousand feet climb up again. After lunch the party drove through the park down to the river where a number of waterbirds were seen. A total of 41 species was recorded.

September 28-October 1: Dryandra Campout

This joint exercise with the Naturalists' Club proved most beneficial to all who participated, as knowledge about all aspects of natural history was gladly shared around. Exciting observations included the Crested Shrike-tit, Malleefowl (working its nest-mound), Bush Thick-knee (with one egg, near the camp), Peregrine Falcon and Tawny Frogmouth. Twelve canoes were launched in Taarblin and Toolbin Lakes on the Monday, providing a new birding experience for some and nesting Freckled Ducks for others. Thanks to the Southwell-Keelys for their invitation and organisation.

October 20-21: Miling Campout

Although some considered the lamb-on-spit provided by Mr and Mrs Lewis to be the highlight of this happy campout, others were inspired by the wide range of birds seen. Black Honeyeaters were in force at a sandplain reserve north of Miling and hundreds of Black-tailed Native-hens scampered in and out of the Moora Swamps. Other birds seen at Moora, Wongan Hills or Lake Hinds included Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens and Budgerigars.

Many ducks at the Moora Swamps had young and breeding by White-faced Herons, Varied Sittellas and Australian Crakes (Mogumber) was also noticed. Our thanks to the Lewis family and Ron and Catherine Van Delft for their planning and for arranging the morning chorus of Pied Butcherbirds.

November 3-4: Woodanilling Campout

Once again the prolific nature of the bird and plant life in this area amazed and delighted the 23 members who were led by Ray Garstone and Wayne Zadow. At least 34 breeding species were seen in the woodlands.

On Saturday on the Woodanilling Golf Course, Rifle Range and gravel pits we sighted 61 species and enjoyed seeing Regent and Elegant Parrots. By various means we climbed to giddy heights to look at fledglings of an Owlet-Nightjar and a Rufous Treecreeper in hollows. One large chick in the nest of a Brown Honeyeater appeared to be a Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo. On two occasions we observed the feeding of immature cuckoos by

foster parents: a Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo was being fed both by Scarlet and Red-capped Robins; a Shining Bronze-Cuckoo was being fed by Yellow-rumped Thornbills.

As our group had become scattered at one stage, Ray needed to rally us together and captured a 1.5 metre Carpet Python as a drawcard. He held it by the tail until we all came up to stroke it in fascination. He then led us to the nest of a Painted Button-quail, where we saw the bird sitting on its four eggs in sedge about four metres away.

At night we listened to a tape recording of the Barking Owl's two-note call and also enjoyed seeing some of Ray's slides of nesting birds.

On Sunday Wayne gave us a grand tour of his property north of Kojonup, which provided us with these highlights: a Peregrine Falcon's nest with one of the young visible and both parent birds flying close-by; a Wedge-tailed Eagle's nest with one young visible; a Tawny Frogmouth sitting on a stick nest; a Brown Songlark's grass nest with pinkish eggs; and a Jacky Winter's tiny nest with bluish eggs. We all had a long and close view of a Crested Shrike-tit feeding near its nest high overhead.

Everyone thoroughly appreciated the tremendous variety of sightings and observations of behaviour. Some of us followed nest-finding principles and found more nests on the early-morning walks. Learning more about raptors in particular was one of the spin-offs of this very special weekend, so we are most grateful to our leaders for their time and efforts.

D. Beckingham

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Observations of birds and mammals at Eyre during August to October have been exceptionally interesting, with not only a **startling run of State and Australian rarities** and a stream of unusual records for Eyre, but also one absolutely stunning day of visible migration.

On 8th August I found a male Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* on seaweed banks to the east of the observatory and it remained there until the 15th. Plumage characters point to its belonging to the race *macronyx*, which breeds in NE China, migrating into SE Asia for the northern winter: this race **has not previously been identified in Australia**. An abortive search for the wagtail on 18th August resulted in our finding a 3-metre long Weddell Seal on the same section of beach. Only the **second Australian occurrence** of this Antarctic species, it allowed close approach and appeared weak, but then it had swum a long way. It had recovered and disappeared into the ocean by next morning.

Both a drake Chestnut Teal on 12th August and a Square-tailed Kite on 19th August were first confirmed records for Eyre and there were further sightings of Square-tails on 19th September, 10th and 20th October. A **Little Stint** on 18th September during the Field Ornithology Course, was another first for Eyre and two Arctic Terns on 20th and a Common Tern on 23rd were of rarity status.

Days like **7th October** are very few and far between. It was a fine, warm morning with a fresh northerly wind when I set off with Tom Delaney, the temporary assistant warden, and five visitors to carry out the regular beach count from Eyre to Nine Mile Hut and on to Twilight Cove. A juvenile Red-capped Robin on the fore-dune was the first surprise, followed by an unusual scattering of Brown Songlarks and Richard's Pipits. Then a Black-tailed Native-hen strutted off the seaweed into the fore-dunes, a first record for Eyre.

Continuing westwards we saw a flock of 20 Crimson Chats on the flats behind the fore-dunes, then another flock, then still more shrub-hopping eastwards and soon a **steady stream of chats** was on the move. By the time we stopped at Nine Mile Hut to quench our thirst we had counted over 500 Crimson Chats. Suddenly we noticed an increasing chorus of penetrating calls, and looking up we were amazed to see a towering, swirling mass of woodswallows, stretching upwards and northwards as far as we could see. They were Masked Woodswallows and we estimated the flock to be of the order of 5,000: they gradually drifted away to the north east. Crimson Chats were now moving through in a broad, continuous stream at and just above shrub level and Tree Martins were quite numerous too.

We piled into the two vehicles and headed through the coastal mallee on the track to Twilight Cove. More Masked Woodswallows flew east (300, 800, 200, and so on), wave after wave after wave, with Crimson Chats in droves and droves buzzing their way across the mallee past us. As if we were not already lucky enough to be in the thick of an avian spectacular, a Malleefowl flushed from the side of the track and **eventually flew 100 metres** before dropping back into the mallee!

Eyre scarcities such as Great Egret, Whimbrel and Australian Shelduck were by the way before we reached the shade of Twilight Cove to shake off the windblown sand, relax, eat, drink and muse over our good fortune. Still the **waves of woodswallows** passed east, high over the cliff-tops. By the time we made the return trip to Eyre in late afternoon we were amongst the tail-end of the movement, with small groups of woodswallows alighting in the mallee and loose flocks of chats feeding on the ground among the shrubs.

Back at the observatory Peter Higgins had not seen a single Masked Woodswallow all day and only a handful of Crimson Chats, so clearly the main movement had headed north east from Nine Mile, but he did count 250+ Tree Martins and a single Fairy Martin. Conservative estimates at 10,000+ Masked Woodswallows and 3,000+ Crimson Chats, together with **74 other species**, were entered in the Daily Log that evening!

The wreck of **seabirds** experienced in the South-West in early August did not occur at Eyre. A single Kerguelen Petrel on 4th, a new record for Eyre, and three prions on 10th August were the only corpses found on 20km of beach during the first half of the month. There were three beach-washed Great-winged Petrels around the end of August to early September, a White-headed Petrel on 2nd October and an Antarctic Fulmar on 24th October, the latter being yet another new record for Eyre.

The monthly totals of species recorded in the observatory area are an interesting representation of the change of the seasons at Eyre: 72 in June, 91 in July, 105 in August, 111 in September and 129 in October.

We get few opportunities to travel out of the observatory area, but on 13th October a visitor was catching a morning bus at Cocklebidy and Tom Delaney and his wife were catching the bus back to Perth in the afternoon, so we had several hours north of the highway on Arubiddy Station. This was true Nullarbor Plain, with a lush growth of grass and perennial flowers after the plentiful rains of late winter. Blending superbly into the sea of waving grass we found a group of three Little Curlews, a vast distance south of their usual range.

Nick Dymond

WADER STUDY GROUP REPORT

With the arrival of large numbers of waders in September and October, the busy time for the Wader Study Group began. Despite a slow start on the local banding front, we have been out to Pelican Point several times and hope to visit this site **once or twice each month** throughout the season. Birds banded at Pelican Point will receive a **coloured plastic band** (white or mauve) in addition to the numbered metal band, as mentioned in the previous *Bird Notes*, and we would most definitely like to know of sightings of such birds. As usual, anyone is welcome to join us on our banding nights.

In addition to banding at Pelican Point, we hope to cross to **Rottnest** to band birds there and get some idea of movements between the mainland and the island. Hopefully we will be able to tie in these trips with the bird walks being organised by Steve Keeling on Rottnest.

On a rather grander scale, yet another **North-West wader study trip** is being organised, this time to run from **March 23 to April 20 1985**. As with previous trips, this will involve banding and counting in the Port Hedland/Eighty Mile Beach/Broome region. Information about this trip will be contained in the December *RAOU Newsletter*, but interested people should contact the office to get detailed information on how things will be organised. A **small bus** will be hired to transport some people from Perth, but private vehicles and especially Four-Wheel Drives are desperately needed to ease transport problems.

Just in case banding isn't your interest and the North-West trip is beyond you, there are also several planned wader counts which need volunteers. Over the past four years, Australia-wide counts have been carried out in Summer and Winter, and the last two such counts are coming up. The weekends to remember are **February 9-10 and 16-17, and June 29-30 and July 6-7**. In addition to these counts, an intensive period of counting is planned for the period from late February to late April, to monitor the northward migration of waders in late summer. This will involve weekly counts at prime sites. Further information will be contained in the December *RAOU Newsletter* and will be sent to past counters when they receive the report on the last winter count.

The increased counting activity coming up should be really worthwhile and hopefully won't be so intense as to take the fun out of it all. For sites near Perth, and possibly further afield, it would be possible to get several people to share the counting so that one person doesn't have to go every weekend.

The final bit of news on the wader scene takes us back to **Pelican Point**. Together with Alfred Cove and the Freeway Foreshore, this is a very important wader site and moves are being made to ensure that this complex will continue to be used by the birds. Pelican Point in particular needs some attention, and work planned includes improved fencing and a new self-closing gate to keep stray dogs out, signposting to tell people why it is important, and a track to guide people to the best points to view birds from and away from areas where they may disturb them. The National Parks Authority may be able to provide the materials but the total cost may prove too much if savings can't be made somewhere. One way in which money can be saved on this project is on labour, and **volunteers** capable of wielding a spade or pushing a wheelbarrow will be sought when the time comes. With enough of us it shouldn't be too much hard work and will hopefully preserve Pelican Point for the birds and make it more pleasant for bird-watchers.

Watch this space for details.

Mike Bamford

ANNUAL BIRD REPORT

Request for Information

Following good rains throughout the Murchison and Gascoyne regions over the past 9 months, conditions for breeding have been extremely good. I have had reports of **Black and Pied Honeyeaters** breeding from large parts of this area. There is already evidence of movement of birds out of this area as it begins to dry up. The sorts of birds we can expect to see in the South-West of the State include Black-tailed Native-hens and various wood-swallows, especially Masked and White-breasted. We can expect to frequently see Crimson Chats and one needs to watch out for Orange Chats. I think records of Black and Pied Honeyeaters might well come from regions where they have not been seen for some years.

I think this could be an interesting irruption and it would be nice to have it well documented for the future. For this reason I encourage people to take note of these birds and to send notes in. These records can be used either in the Annual Bird Report, or if there are enough, possibly a paper on the irruption of birds into the South-West of the State might make interesting reading.

Annual Bird Report

Work on the 1983 report is well under way and I am pleased to say that we have many more reports than we did for the 1982 report. Records for 1984 are already arriving. The work load is now becoming quite large and I would appreciate it if further reports can be sent in **on the proper forms or on large A4 sheets of paper**. This makes filing and handling much easier.

As far as the sheets are concerned, there is no need to use the RAOU number. I am still receiving some localities which I cannot find in the *Traveller's Atlas* and so would appreciate people using a local name but then clarifying this with some land-mark that occurs in the index of the Atlas.

There is another area in which you could be of tremendous help to me, and that is placing your records **in the correct sequence** as occurs in the 1982 report. Of more help still would be to put all records of the same species together, but I realise that some of you do not have time for this. I look forward to receiving your records with interest. Good birding.

Geoff Shannon, 29 Waldemar Street, Gwelup 6021.

GROUND PARROT PROJECT

It is now December and the Ground Parrot Project is in the **writing-up stage**. Eight field trips have been made to the South Coast, ranging in length from three to 17 days. Thanks to a large number of members, we have been able to "work" more than **50 sites** for Ground Parrots. While the weather has made work difficult at times, enthusiasm has remained high.

What have we found? Ground Parrots have been located in a limited area in **Cape Arid National Park**, a limited area in **Fitzgerald River National Park** and at several locations in an area of **Vacant Crown Land** immediately to the north of the Fitzgerald River National Park. The number of Ground Parrots found at one site has varied from one to ten birds. About 50 other sites were "worked" without success.

We have found Ground Parrots quite easy to hear — if you are in the right spot! On almost all successful evenings, Ground Parrots have **called between 25 minutes and 45 minutes after sunset**. Other birds stop calling around 30-35 minutes after sunset. In the morning, Ground Parrots are the first to call and this lasts for only 10-15 minutes. This is less intense than evening calling. Listening in the morning is difficult for two reasons. Firstly, you have to get up around 0345 in October, and secondly, Tawny-crowned Honeyeaters are very noisy at that time.

On two occasions in the project, Ground Parrots have been heard calling during the day, but on each occasion only one call was made. This made it very difficult to be sure that the calls were made by Ground Parrots, almost impossible if the observers had not been familiar with the parrot's calls.

To actually see a Ground Parrot takes a lot of luck or a lot of work (some people say both). Several **sightings** have been made during the project and most of these have resulted from **days of trudging** through suitable vegetation. Luck prevailed on one occasion where a Ground Parrot was calling during the day (i.e. about once an hour). This enabled Keith Bradby and I to approximate its position, walk to it, then wait till it called again. It did — only 25 metres from us. We simply walked towards the spot and up it flew — a beautiful deep green parrot. It swiftly zig-zagged on shallow, fast wing beats low over the heath and dropped down about 150 metres in front of us. We were lucky!

Though this project is nearing completion, **our knowledge is still limited**. Do get in touch with the office if you would like to know where you can go to hear Ground Parrots. Any effort you can put into listening or looking will be of value. We need to increase our knowledge of this species in WA if we are to be sure that appropriate management techniques are being used in the areas where Ground Parrots still exist.

Doug Watkins

METROPOLITAN BIRD PROJECT

The project has got off to a successful start, despite the delay in producing "*Metro Birding Kits*". It seems that doing monthly surveys of local parks was already a popular pastime amongst our members! You can still join our growing network of observers by contacting the office.

Current project activities include:

- arranging one metropolitan **bird walk** per month. Members are welcome, but may be asked to help new birders! Some walks are joint RAOU/bird project walks.
- creating **display boards** for shopping centre and library displays. Particular thanks go to Mr H. Jonker who designed and made the display board frames.

- writing the **computer programme**. This aspect may dominate time during the next month. Members familiar with PASCAL programming are urged to contact the office.
- general activities such as publicity, administration and office duties. Many thanks to the numerous **office volunteers** who have helped the project get off to a quick start.

A special thank you to Graeme Chapman, Ian Edgar, Peel Howden, Roger Jaensch, Murray Unkovich and Peter Wilmot, who kindly donated their hard earned **slides** to the RAOU. The next newsletter will detail bird species which we are missing.

Unfortunately RAOU members are not distributed evenly throughout Perth, resulting in important reserves needing people. If you don't mind travelling 5-15kms to your metro birding site each month (or two months) please contact me at the office.

I am looking forward to receiving and analysing all the data that comes in.

Happy birding.

Ron Van Delft

SOUTH WEST WATERBIRD PROJECT

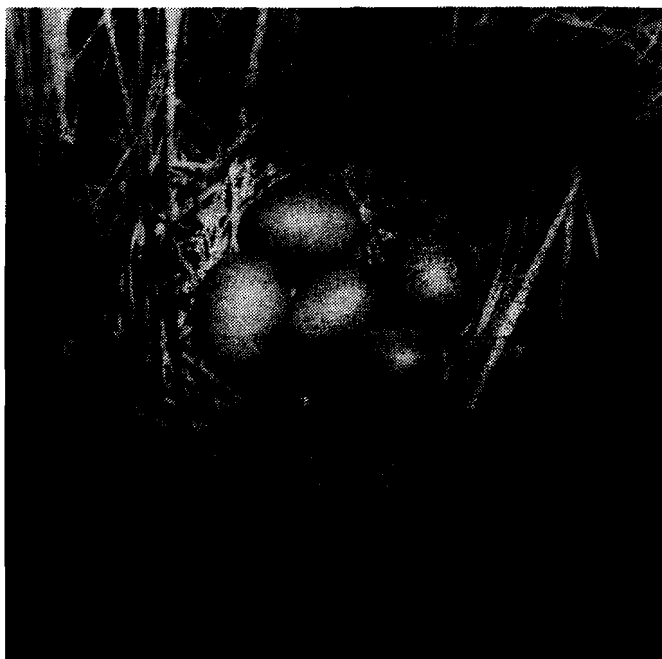
Report by Field Officer — Roger Jaensch

1. Breeding Records

Although the Project is concentrating on the counting of waterbirds using nature reserves, it also aims to collect breeding information in simple form. While searching for nests **should not detract** from the primary objective of obtaining thorough counts of waterbirds, additional time spent looking for nests can provide invaluable data. The value of many wetland nature reserves as breeding areas is not known, so certainly any nests or young that you 'stumble upon' are worth reporting.

2. Nesting by Crakes and Rails

If a wetland contains patches of dense inundated vegetation (e.g. rushes, tussocks, thickets of low shrubs), you can usually assume that at least one crane or rail is lurking therein. You might be fortunate to flush a crane or rail while wading through this type of wetland, but if the going is slow (too deep or thick), the crakes or rails will probably have time to scurry ahead of you (hidden), rather than flying.



The glossy olive-brown eggs of the Baillon's Crane are sometimes laid in small tussocks of fine rush growing within small, flooded shrubs. Photograph by Roger Jaensch.

The most productive situation for viewing crakes is clear edges of beds of rush which have become muddy due to falling water-levels. However, a surprisingly **useful method for recording crakes** at times of higher water-levels is to locate their nests!

Admittedly, some experience is helpful in such an exercise, but if you can identify a habitat likely to be productive, **careful** and persistent searching could bring rewarding results. Of course, disturbance to nesting birds must be minimised: this can be achieved by taking care not to trample sites likely to contain nests — just peer in! Remember that **ravens** are cunning, thieving birds and they might be attracted to investigate damaged vegetation.

Bearing in mind the great variety of habitats in our wetlands and the ability of birds to behave in 'uncharacteristic' fashion now and then, the following notes may be useful:

(a) In general

- most crakes lay their eggs soon after water-levels begin to fall;
- crakes and rails have no difficulty in moving about in **deep water** (they swim well);
- many nests are *not* placed in the middle, but often near the edges of dense cover;
- familiarity with **calls** is useful: calling birds at least encourage you to search!;
- breeding by crakes and rails in the South West tends to occur from September to January (latest on the South Coast);
- nests of these birds are generally shallow bowls, often neatly shaped but sometimes just local material twisted into place: in size, smaller than your cupped hand;
- if you find a nest with eggs, **describe** the colour and pattern of the eggs on your data sheet and I'll attempt to identify them;
- young **leave the nest** soon after hatching, and are initially all black.

(b) Buff-banded Rail

- may nest on dry land (e.g. in crops);
- in swamps, it often places its nest in the middle of a small shrub which has **fine rush** growing thickly through it;
- eggs are whitish or cream, with heavy reddish and faint mauve spots.

(c) Baillon's Crane

- one of the **earliest** nesters — active nests rarely encountered after early October;
- nests in '**exposed**' sites such as small isolated tussocks or small spindly shrubs with a light growth of rush;
- often nests in **temporary** wetlands such as roadside ponds;
- eggs are dark olive-brown, un-marked.

(d) Australian Crane

- prefers to nest at the **edge** of an area of suitable habitat, often in isolated plants or clumps;
- most often recorded breeding outside the high rainfall districts;
- eggs are light green-brown with prominent brown spots.

(e) Spotless Crane

- often a **late-nesting** species;
- prefers to nest deep in a bed of tall rushes or a flooded shrub-thicket;
- occurs mainly in **permanent** wetlands (or at least regularly inundated for eight months of the year);
- may use dry nest material, giving the impression that the newly-built nest is 'old', e.g. in *Typha*;
- eggs are basically buff or fawn in colour with fine freckles (same colour) all over.

3. Identification of Fresh-Water Waders

Waders, particularly those species which visit us from Asia, can be perplexing — even to experienced observers. However, please do try to identify any seen and **note the reasons for your identification** on the data sheet. These notes will then assist me if you're not sure as to what the birds are. At least

