



Western Australian Bird Notes

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

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MEMBERSHIP TOPS 500

Steady growth in membership of the RAOU in Western Australia has been apparent for several years and the 500 mark was passed early in 1985. On 23rd January, our records indicated that **525 RAOU members were based in W.A.** This has caused some chaos at the Melbourne Office as the computer listings for W.A. members now need to be handled on two files!

Recent acceleration in the rate of membership increase can be attributed to the efforts of the Metropolitan Bird Project (especially Ron Van Delft), the Rottnest Bird Walks (especially Steve Keeling, Nick Klomp and other leaders), and the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre (Mandy Silberstein).

The WA Group of the RAOU is certainly a force to be reckoned with, being a large community interest group by any standards and having a tremendous volunteer force for collection of bird data. Our publications, activities and projects are the envy of many other groups and the Victorian Branch of the RAOU has emulated some of our methods and strategies.

The Committee of the W.A. Group has a heavy responsibility in organising such a large 'operation' and its present and past officers have contributed mightily. However, we **need more assistance** from members, especially in the areas of office volunteers, typists, leaders for excursions and helpers at meetings. These are not complicated needs, but are nevertheless important.

Members are encouraged to offer their help and suggestions on the running of our activities to a member of the Committee. (See list on back page).



Bird-walks for the Metro Bird Project have been tremendously popular.
Photograph by Eric Van Delft.

THE ATTRACTION OF ARGYLE

Many travellers have visited the Lake Argyle Tourist Village but few would have been aware of the importance of this massive wetland for waterbirds. The Ord Dam and Tourist Village are situated in the rugged north-western sector of the lake which, being mostly steep-sided, has few feeding opportunities for waterbirds.

The eastern and southern shores of Lake Argyle are mostly shallow and are interrupted by interesting inlets which are actually drowned valleys of creeks. This type of environment attracts large numbers of waterbirds to feed on the abundant food items which thrive in the warm shallows.

Access to the eastern shores is restricted, with only one convenient approach for conventional vehicles, along the old route of the Duncan Highway. Even this can be difficult in places, especially in the wet season. Local ornithologist Ken Mills has made several visits to the area and has alerted us to its potential for use by waterbirds.

On 4th January, 1985, I was privileged to be able to make a four hour survey of 5.5km of shoreline of the lake in the vicinity of Matilda Creek. **Forty-four species** of waterbirds were recorded, including 16 species of waders. This result compares more than favourably with other wetlands of the Kimberley, such as the Parry Creek floodplain area.

The wet season had not fully begun, so birds were still in fair numbers. Most numerous were more than 3,000 Oriental Pratincoles, flushed continuously from short new growth above the water line. Totals for the Little Curlew and Plumed and Wandering Whistling-Ducks each exceeded 500 and declining species such as the Green Pygmy-Goose and Radjah Shelduck were also well represented. Six Comb-crested Jacanas made a strange sight trotting about on water weed, rather more exposed than in their usual lily-pad haunts.

The great annual rise and fall in water level of Lake Argyle restricts the establishment of permanent aquatic vegetation such as bulrush *Typha* or freshwater mangrove *Barringtonia*. However, the bare shores in the late dry season are ideal for migratory waders such as Marsh Sandpipers which were spread along the entire survey route on 4th January. Jabirus were seen catching Long Tom fish in the sheltered inlets and they were accompanied by Intermediate Egrets, Glossy Ibises, Royal Spoonbills and Black-tailed Godwits. Less common species included the White-winged Tern and a *Gallinago* snipe.

Clearly this picture could have been repeated many times along the 100km of shallows around Lake Argyle. The potential importance of this site as a wetland of international significance might well be investigated by the RAOU in coming years. R.J.

COMING MEETINGS

Meetings of the WA Group of the RAOU are currently held in the **Herdsmen Lake Wildlife Centre**, unless a different venue is announced in this newsletter. The room opens at 7.30pm and meetings aim to start at 8.00pm. Visitors are especially welcome.

Car-parking space is available at the entrance to the Centre's driveway, near the intersection of Flynn Road and Selby Street, Wembley.

Monday 25th March: Dr Weishu Hsu:

The RAOU is privileged to have a visiting Chinese ornithologist, Dr. Hsu, speak to us about **bird study in the People's Republic of China**. Dr. Hsu is Associate Professor at the Peking Natural History Museum (Head of Vertebrates Section) and Deputy Secretary-General of the Ornithological Society of China.

This is not the first visit of Dr. Hsu to Australia but it will be his longest, staying two months in Western Australia. His talk will include a small selection of slides and will be given in English, with a little Mandarin flavour here and there!

Do come along and meet Dr. Hsu. He is a very approachable man, eager to meet other bird-watchers and learn about their activities and aspirations.

Monday 27th May: Film Night:

On this occasion we will be screening "*Wings over the Danube*", a colour film about birds of Hungary and Bulgaria with long sequences of Spoonbills and Great Egrets at the nest. This film was made in the early 1960's and some of it was seen on British TV.

The venue for this film will be the **F.J. Clarke Lecture Theatre**, in the **Queen Elizabeth II Medical Centre** starting at 7.30pm. The cost will be \$3.00 for members and \$5 for visitors. Refreshments will be provided.

This will take the place of the advertised May 6th meeting and proceeds will be put towards capital equipment for the Eyre Bird Observatory. **Tickets are available from Committee members.**

COMING EXCURSIONS

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.

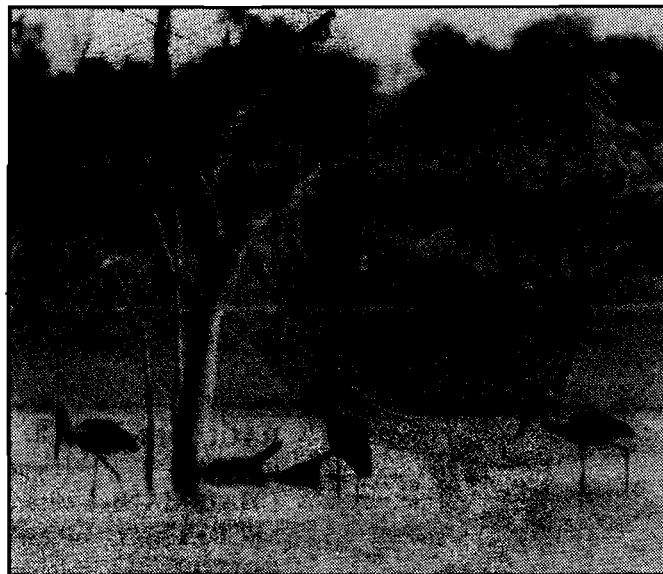
Codes MBP = part of the programme of the Metropolitan Bird Project, organised by Project Officer, Ron Van Delft.
 MBP/RAOU = Joint excursion of MBP and RAOU.
 SWS = Special Waterbird Survey, organised by Field Officer Roger Jaensch.
 RAOU = 'standard' RAOU excursions.

Sunday, March 24: Alfred Cove (MBP)

Your last chance to see the migratory waders before they return to Asia — and receive some clues on how to identify them. Some waders may be sporting their breeding colours! Alfred Cove is also a good place to see Buff-banded Rails. Meet at 9.00am at the carpark near the tall antenna.

Saturday, March 30: Dumbleyung Lake Survey (SWS)

Dumbleyung Lake is the largest inland lake, by volume, in the southern part of Western Australia. Although it has sometimes been dry, when full it exceeds 4.0 metres in depth. As such, Dumbleyung Lake is an important wetland for water-



Jabirus seek out Long Toms and other fish in the inlets on the eastern side of Lake Argyle.

Photograph by Roger Jaensch.

birds, particularly in drier months. Being of such a large area, it has rarely been thoroughly investigated for the South-West Waterbird Project.

Any person wishing to participate in a boat survey of Dumbleyung Lake on March 30th, should contact **Roger Jaensch** at the RAOU office before Friday, March 22. Some experience in counting waterbirds would be useful but not essential (we always need scribes!) Extra boats or canoes will be useful.

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

From our gathering place at Stirling Square in Stirling Street, Guildford (0830), we expect to visit the 'conservation area' identified in the Whiteman Park Concept Plan. We might visit the Edgumbe Bird Sanctuary afterwards.

Saturday, April 20: Seabirds — 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 W.A.** 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 28: Kelmscott Bushland/Mary Carroll Park (MBP/RAOU)

This will replace the advertised visit to CooLoongup Lake. We aim to visit bushland near Peter Curry's house where more than 60 species of birds have been recorded and later carry on to Mary Carroll Park to look at waterbirds. Park in Orlando Street, Kelmscott, beside the Kelmscott Primary School at 9.00am. We will gather again at 11.00am at Mary Carroll Park, in Eudoria Street, Gosnells.

Saturday, May 5: John Forrest National Park (RAOU).

Meet at 9.00am at Glen Brook Dam, via No. 2 Entrance — look out for the kangaroos! Do Southern Emu-wrens still occur in the Park? What about Crested Shrike-tits?

Monday, May 13: Peel Inlet Survey (SWS)

Many people know that Peel Inlet is the most important wetland in the south of the State, but few have first-hand experience of the bird-life of its eastern shore reserves. A resolute team of observers from the local branch of the Naturalists Club has made monthly counts of waterbirds in this area since May 1982.

If you would like to assist the team in their last survey and encounter the waterbirds of this interesting 'wild' area, please contact Roger Jaensch. Surveys in May often produce large totals of Great Egrets and White-faced Herons.

Sunday, May 19: Ferndale wetlands (MBP)

This area must be good for birds, as four metro birding sites lie between Riverton and Nicholson Road bridges! Meet at the Kent Street weir on Canning River, Wilson, 2.00pm.

Saturday, May 25: Chittering Valley (RAOU)

Meet at 0830 at the roadhouse at Chittering, mid-way between Muchea and Bindoon on the Great Northern Highway. We may also visit the Moondyne Reserve. Organiser — Brian Barrett, 295 2136.

Saturday, June 8: Lake Claremont/Swanbourne Beach (RAOU/MBP)

We will be specifically looking for White-winged Fairy-wrens in the sand dunes at Swanbourne, starting at the Swanbourne Beach carpark (north end of Marine Parade) at 0800. Gather at the south end of Strickland Street, Swanbourne at 1030 for a look at Lake Claremont.

MEETING REPORTS

The 1984 Annual Social Night was held in the grounds of the W.A.I.T. at Bentley on 1st December. Weather conditions were once again excellent and the chicken and curry meal was devoured by observers returning from the Bird Tally. The dinner provided a relaxed setting for meeting and chatting with newcomers and friends.

The Annual General Meeting at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre on 14th January, was attended by about 70 persons. A new committee was elected (see back page), reports were read and members enjoyed the opportunity to talk about the coming year with other bird-watchers.

EXCURSION REPORTS

17-18 November: Karakin — 'Sapphire' — Gingin

Beginning our morning at the sandpits on K.W. Road south of Lancelin, we recorded 23 species and had superb views of White-backed Swallows. At Karakin Lake we recorded 30 species including hundreds of Straw-necked Ibises, Black-winged Stilts, a few waders, four Emus and a Stubble Quail.

Before setting up camp at Sapphire Bird Sanctuary we made a full circuit of this lake and counted 40 species. Here we watched young Yellow-billed Spoonbills being fed in three separate but neighbouring nests in paperbarks in the lake. In the cormorant colony, three young Little Black Cormorants were being fed and we also had numerous glimpses of immature and adult Night Herons.

On Sunday, led by Bruce Buchanan, we explored Big Bootine L. and the Beermullah lake area which were new to us but familiar to Bruce from regular surveys. The lake north of Drew Road gave us good sightings of spoonbills, waders, grebes and a Glossy Ibis.

D. Beckingham

January 25-28: Torbay Campout

This three day campout was attended by 35 adults and several day visitors. We all enjoyed the sweeping ocean views of the Woodbury Boston complex and listed forty species of birds, including Southern Emu-wrens, Elegant Parrots and Red-eared Firetails within 500 metres of the camp. On nearby swampland at Cosy Corner a Spotted Harrier was seen several times, at the mouth of the creek on Perkins Beach we saw two Hooded Plovers, and a seawatch at Shelley's Beach gave good views of Flesh-footed Shearwaters.

Further afield at Lake Grasmere an Australasian Bittern, a Cat-tle Egret, a Buff-banded Rail and Greenshanks were recorded, while at Torbay Inlet 200 Red-necked Avocets, 750 Red-necked Stints and 4 Spotted Crakes were noted.

At Two People's Bay, thanks to a dawn arrival and Lesley Harrison's guiding, many of us had the thrill of hearing then seeing two Western Bristlebirds feeding on a path. Others saw the elusive Western Whipbird and some even caught fleeting glimpses of the Noisy Scrub-bird which was calling loudly near the Picnic Area. Steven Gast returned at dawn the next day to have an even better look at a Noisy Scrub-bird behind the Ranger's Office.

The Anecdote competition was won by Simon Nevill with two lively stories about climbing to a Peregrine's nest and luring an inquisitive emu. Doug and company carolled their way through 'The Twelve Birds of Torbay', transposing 'a partridge in a pear tree' to a more appropriate 'osprey in a gum tree'.

We listened for Ground Parrots on two evenings without success, but managed to see a Tawny Frogmouth and a young Boobook Owl during these patrols.

D. Beckingham

NOTE: No reports have been received for the excursion to Woodman Point (24/11/84) or Maylands area (16/12/84).

January 26: Gingin Wetlands

Eighteen people gathered south of Gingin on 26 January 1985 before moving on to Big Bootine Swamp. This wetland was nearly dry and only 50 Red-capped Plovers remained of the 500 present two weeks previously. Similar large numbers appeared when the swamp dried in 1984.

The next site visited was Beermullah Lake, where bird numbers had diminished because of water skiing, and the adjacent Drew Lake which had large concentrations of Little Black Cormorants. Lunch was eaten on the shores of Bambun Lake to an accompaniment of Clamorous Reed-Warblers. A short walk along the southern shore revealed a lone Avocet swimming 50 metres from the shore. This was the 44th species seen at the Lake.

Bruce Buchanan

Metropolitan Bird Project bird-walks

A bird-walk held at the Bayswater Bird Sanctuary on 18 November attracted 80 persons, while another at Forrestdale Lake on 13 January was attended by 35. A number of new members were secured as a result of these gatherings.

January 20: Lake Gwelup walk

Thirty four species were seen by over 80 observers at Lake Gwelup on Sunday. It was an excellent day for bird watching although the winds were up a little.

The large group was split into three smaller groups lead by Ruth Clark, Geoff Shannon and Kevin Jordan.

Some of the birds seen included the Clamorous Reed-Warbler, Grey Butcherbird and Sacred Kingfisher. The Australasian Grebes were breeding and chicks were seen bobbing up and down amongst the waves.

Ruth Clark

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

The overall recording area for Eyre Bird Observatory is six ten minute grid-squares, approximately 47km from east to west and 37km from north to south, but one-fifth of this area is ocean. A high proportion of our time is spent in the 'home' square and 176 species have been recorded in this square. The Observatory total stands at 220 at the end of 1984, but includes an old pre-observatory record of Crested Shrike-tit which looks rather doubtful in view of the species' habitat preference, sedentary habits and RAOU Atlas status.

Monthly totals of species well illustrate the peak season for variety: June-72; July-91, August-105, September-113, October-129, November-111 and December-103. I shall be int-

rigued to see how we fare through the remainder of my first year here.

The **Shore Birds Course** at the end of October into November only attracted three participants, a very disappointing response especially for Angela Jessop from RAOU HQ who had travelled over to co-lead the course. However, as we had only one functional vehicle it worked out well, and everyone had really excellent views of 19 species of waders, as well as seeing a wide variety of other species. I discovered from Angela that our spring assemblage of 75 or so Sooty Oystercatchers represents at least 6% of the known Australian total. Thus, nationally, this must be by far the **rarest species** of bird that is regularly present at Eyre.

A Wood Sandpiper at Cocklebiddy on 17 November and 22 Greenshanks and 10 Common Sandpipers near Nine Mile reef in late November were the most noteworthy wader records until the New Year. Then stifling temperatures of up to 47°C on 11 January on the Nullarbor may have induced some plains waders to seek cooler areas: I saw my first Oriental Plover on January 12 on the return journey from Cocklebiddy.

Along the beach and dune-flats next day we found no less than **22 Oriental Plovers**, **44 Banded Lapwings** and one Inland Dotterel — all had gone the day after.

Parrots warrant a mention this time. The higher-than-average rainfall and lush conditions on the Hampton Tableland induced good numbers of **Budgerigars** to move into the area and breed, and flocks of several hundred have been a regular feature of trips to Cocklebiddy: up to 1,000 have been drinking at the sewage pool behind the motel! A pair of Naretha Blue-Bonnets has been seen on several occasions in one area south of the Eyre Highway and may well have nested in our recording area for the first time (we haven't had time to prove it!). The highlight of the beach count on 23 December was, remarkably, a flock of **12 Cockatiels feeding on the seaweed** at Nine Mile (just one old record for our area, one at Cocklebiddy). Next week, on 30 December, the prize went to two Rock Parrots, also at Nine Mile, with a further three on 18 January (three previous records).

Our local **Pink Cockatoos** have provided visitors with endless enjoyment. Around the observatory building they come to drink, to bicker with the Australian Ravens, swing on the radio aerial and of course to wake everyone up. On the beach some have been watched inexplicably wading into the gently running surf. They are also dab hands at picking the seeds of *Spinifex hirsutus* and I am thinking of training them to sow the seeds in rows all over the mobile sand dunes. The peak count of cockatoos to date is 93 plus the one remaining hybrid Galah/Pink Cockatoo, but I think we might get a century soon.

Brush Bronzewing have been good value too, with as many as five simultaneously at the drinking tray on the roof of the underground tank (when the ravens and cockies were away). At least 10 individuals come in to drink on some days.

During a too-long period with no visitors in November we had a **nocturnal mist-netting** session in the mallee above the escarpment, resulting in five Owllet-nightjars banded. Campouts at Nine Mile and in the dunes 8km east of Eyre enabled us to band most useful selections of honeyeaters. The combined November/December totals were 372 banded and 80 retraps and lots of completed moult-cards.

The post-Christmas period has been very hectic, with a welcome stream of visitors, two **departing Assistant Wardens** (thank you Peter and Jill for all your help) and one newly-arrived Assistant (welcome Anthony). We've also had plenty of problems with the one and only vehicle. Fitted into this period have been 14 trips to Cocklebiddy, seven additional trips to the Microwave Tower and one mechanical-repair trip to Arubiddy Station, 30km north of Cocklebiddy. Many thanks to Peter Brown for his help, advice and expertise with oxy-acetylene and sledge-hammer.

Lastly I would like to say a big **Thank You** to all our friends over west, in the land of traffic-jams, supermarkets and round-the-corner services, for the consignment of kitchen-ware, hardware, furnishings, tools and odds and ends, and also for the seasonal goodies that were intended for, and ended up in, our stomachs.

Nick Dymond

ANNUAL REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

R.A.O.U. (W.A. GROUP) 1984

I have much pleasure in presenting the Annual Report of the W.A. Group for 1984. It has been a year of much activity, growth and change. Dr Stephen Davies resigned as Chairman of the Group upon his appointment as Director of R.A.O.U. and Miss Barbara Hale was elected in his place at the August General Meeting. **Tribute has already been paid to Dr Davies for his Chairmanship** over many years and to his enthusiasm and foresight, which has led to the expansion of bird-watching in this State and, consequently, to the increase in membership. In addition, your committee wishes to place on record in this report their appreciation of his work for, and his untiring dedication to, the aims of R.A.O.U. in W.A.

In February, the Group moved into **office space at Canning Bridge**, from which the Field Officers can operate and which acts as a focal point for members and activities of the Group. Here a start has been made on building up a small library of publications and slides for the use of members. The cost of maintaining this office is borne largely by the various projects run in Western Australia, but the W.A. Group members contribute over \$800 a year and staff if on a voluntary basis five mornings a week. As we now have over four hundred members, this is approximately \$2.00 per member.

You may be interested to know that Western Australia, the State with a tenth of Australia's population, makes up about a quarter of R.A.O.U.'s membership and provides about a fifth of its subscription revenue. No one can deny the advantages of having such an office, but as no portion of our national membership fee is returned for the Group's use, its existence has increased the need for fund-raising in order to maintain it. This has mainly taken the form of buying in bulk several publications and reselling them at a small profit. Fortunately, there has been no dearth in the publication of bird books and the demand for them.

Your Committee has made the decision to charge a nominal fee for *W.A. Bird Notes* from the beginning of 1985, and is exploring other avenues to cover its costs which are at present borne by the Projects which terminate within twelve months' time. I am sure you will agree that this publication is an excellent newsletter, and our thanks and congratulations on its quality are due to Roger Jaensch, its editor.

The main event of the year was the launching of the *Atlas of Australian Birds* by the Governor, Professor Gordon Reid. Not only was it a memorable occasion, but a very enjoyable social one. Five General Meetings were held during the year in the Mathematics Building at the University of Western Australia, and were well attended. The venue was not altogether satisfactory as, although equipment for the projection of slides and video recordings was excellent, the absence of an adjacent supper room discouraged social contact after the formal part of the meeting. In 1985 we will try using the **Wildlife Centre** at Lake Herdsman.

The 24-hour **bird tally** held prior to the end-of-year party was again popular with 14 teams rushing enthusiastically round the metropolitan area. Many more **excursions** were held during the year, and these have been reported fully in *Bird Notes*. All were well attended, including the eight weekend ones. Of the latter, the one to Dryandra was a successful joint activity with the WA Naturalists Club.

In the middle of the year a **questionnaire** was distributed to members in an endeavour to find out which aspects of bird-watching were of particular interest to members, and to seek assistance and suggestions in order to utilize the wide variety of expertise present in the membership. There was a good response and the Committee was delighted by the positive suggestions and offers of assistance received, and it will be acting on many of them.

Our participation in the nation-wide **Bird Week** and the mounting of a display at the Royal Show have publicised bird-watching

and R.A.O.U. to the Community, as have a series of **bird walks** conducted on Rottnest Island with the assistance of the Island's Education Officer in the August school holidays. The latter proved so popular that similar ones have been run during the summer holiday season. We are also becoming well-known to government bodies and local authorities, in that we have been invited to **comment on environmental matters** and have made a further submission to the Committee assisting the Land Release Review. We have also made representations regarding such matters as the use of insecticides in wetlands and the disturbance of tern nesting areas.

I would like to comment on the **support given to the major R.A.O.U. projects by our members** who have participated so enthusiastically. There are also other individual projects such as the WA Bird Report, which are continuing. The interest they provide has helped to maintain the general feeling of purpose and cooperative fellowship first engendered by the Bird Atlas.

It has also been a year of change for the **Eyre Bird Observatory**. Peter and Di Congreve retired as Wardens in May, thus bringing to an end a memorable era of bird-watching and warm hospitality at Eyre, which will long be remembered by those of you who have stayed there. We were fortunate in obtaining the services of Nick Dymond with his experience in British Observatories, who took up the position of Warden in June. Two Assistant Wardens from New South Wales were appointed, but both resigned at the end of the year to pursue studies. Eyre is now a recognised weather station sending information to the Bureau of Meteorology twice a day, which makes it necessary to have at least two members of staff there all the year.

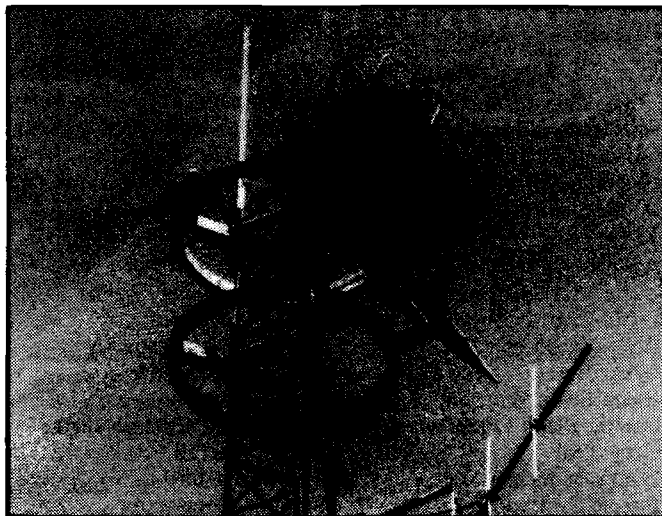
Facilities have been improved at Eyre by the installation of a telephone and a solar energy plant. The latter will cut down the fuel consumption if we can replace the gas appliances with electrical ones. Donations are being sought from companies for these, as well as for a four-wheel drive vehicle which is badly needed. Members have responded generously to requests for household goods.

It remains for me to **thank many people** for their support and interest throughout the past year. First I wish to pay tribute to the hard-working members of the Committee and Sub-Committees, especially the Vice-Chairman Rosalind Denny who, in the absence of Stephen Davies in Melbourne, acted as Chairman for many months, the Secretary Joan Seabrook and the Treasurer Dan Drakes, neither of whom is seeking re-election to these positions. Joan's involvement with R.A.O.U. goes back many years, during which she has contributed much to the WA Group, and I am glad that she has now become a member of the 1985 Committee. Dan Drakes has been a meticulous treasurer and we shall be sorry to lose his help. Thanks are also due to our office volunteers who either regularly, or at short notice, have given their time in staffing the office, undertaking a variety of clerical tasks.

It would be invidious to mention names as I am sure it is true to say that every member has, in some way, contributed to the Group. But I wish to record my thanks to the Field Officers and other experienced ornithologists who have patiently given of their knowledge, the Excursion leaders — especially the organisers of the Campouts who have ensured the success of these popular activities, the donors of household items and tools for Eyre and of books for meeting raffles, the providers of interest-free loans to allow us to make bulk purchases of books for resale, those individuals who have done their own fund-raising for the Group by making and selling jams and cakes, those who have organised the catering for the social functions or have mounted displays for Bird Week at the Royal Show, those members who generously offered the use of their properties for campouts, and those who — at short notice — went to Eyre as volunteer Assistant Wardens to help out.

In short, **thank you all** for your enthusiasm and support which makes this such a great Group to belong to.

BARBARA M. HALE



This Osprey nest at the top of a television tower in Onslow, has been used on several occasions. The nest interferes with TV reception, but this is tolerated by the residents of Onslow.

Photograph by Geoff Shannon.

METRO BIRD PROJECT

Publicity in local newspapers in early January gave a tremendous boost to the Metro Bird Project. Over 70 enquiries were received resulting in over 51 new sites gaining observers. **Special thanks** must go to the the RAOU members who are providing results for over 90 sites.

Unfortunately, the distribution of birdwatchers around the Metropolitan area is still uneven. **People are required** in the following localities and reserves;

- any locality in the following suburbs: Cannington, Queens Park, Hamersley, Balcatta, Greenwood and Glen Forrest;
- reserves needing people include: Carine Swamp, Trigg open space, Gnararra Lake, Jandabup Lake, Hyde Park, Lesmurdie Falls, Buckland Hill and the salt flats at Garrett Road Bridge.

Extra observers would be welcomed for Whiteman Park and Mawson Park.

The **first analysis** of results is expected to be completed during April. Office volunteers are currently typing in the data!

Observers who feel that their reserve has a lot to offer are invited to contact me to arrange a public **bird walk**. A public bird walk raises awareness of the importance of your site. The relevant local authority is always informed about the walk beforehand.

I wish to correct some confusion regarding the excellent **bird slides** shown by Channel 9 as background for the weather. I sent the slides in but acknowledgement was not given to the people who donated them to the RAOU slide library. Efforts have been made to obtain due acknowledgement in the future.

Although the **RAOU slide library** now has over 150 slides it lacks slides of several birds which are very common around Perth. Birds which lack representation in the library include;

Hoary-headed Grebe	Grey Fantail
Australian Kestrel	Clamorous Reed-Warbler
Silver Gull	Western Gerygone
Laughing Turtle-Dove	Brown Honeyeater
Port Lincoln Ringneck	Striated Pardalote
Welcome Swallow	Australian Magpie-lark
Tree Martin	Australian Magpie
Rufous Whistler	Australian Raven

Slides of these birds will be gratefully accepted and acknowledged in our catalogue.

RECOMMENDED SURVEY DATES FOR M.B.P.

* March 6-12 * April 3-9 * May 1-7 * May 29-June 4

BIRD TALLY — 1984

The data for the 1984 24hr Metropolitan Bird Tally has been fully analysed and provides information on what birds are commonly seen in one day in December. Table One shows the 27 species of birds which were seen by all of the 15 teams that participated in the hunt.

Table One:

Australian Pelican	Crested Tern
Little Black Cormorant	Laughing Turtle-Dove
Little Pied Cormorant	Port Lincoln Ringneck
White-faced Heron	Laughing Kookaburra
Great Egret	Welcome Swallow
Black Swan	Tree Martin
Pacific Black Duck	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike
Grey Teal	Willie Wagtail
Dusky Moorhen	Red Wattlebird
Purple Swamphen	Singing Honeyeater
Eurasian Coot	Brown Honeyeater
Black-winged Stilt	Australian Magpie
Silver Gull	Australian Raven
Caspian Tern	

The average number of species of birds seen by each team increased by 13 for 1984 compared with 1983. In 1983 there was an average of 71.8 species per team and in 1984 there was an average of 84.6 per team.

The types of habitats visited by the teams play a large part in determining the types of birds seen. Tables Two and Three outline the number of teams that visited the various habitats.

Table Two:

Habitat Range	No. of Teams
Lake, Bush, River, Ocean sites	8
Lake, Bush, River sites only	2
Lake, River, Ocean sites only	4
River, and Lake sites only	1

Table Three

Habitat	% Of Teams Visiting The Habitat	
	1983	1984
Lake	80	100
Bush	60	66
River	55	100
Ocean	38	80

A total of 40 sites were visited by the teams and the ten sites most visited in the 1984 Bird Tally are listed below in descending order.

Table Four:

Site Name	No. of Teams	Site Name	No. of Teams
1. Alfred Cove	12	6. Pelican Pt	6
2. Bibra Lake	12	7. Lake Monger	5
3. Woodman Point	11	8. Kings Park	4
4. Herdsman Lake	9	9. South Mole, N. Mole	4
5. Thomsons Lake	7	10. Lake Claremont	3

The 40 sites visited by the teams can be categorised into different habitats.

Table Five:

Habitat Type	No. of Sites	Habitat Type	No. of Sites
Lake	18	River	7
Bush	11	Ocean	4

In the 1983 Metropolitan Bird Tally, Bridled Terns were sighted by 6 of the 21 teams. The 1984 Bird Tally failed to show any sign of the tern, possibly because favoured haunts near Rockingham were excluded from the latest tally.

The 1984 bird tally covered a radius of 30km from the Perth G.P.O. and gave a good indication of the birds of the Perth Metropolitan Area.

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FIELD IDENTIFICATION

SNIPE

The snipe of the genus *Gallinago* pose special difficulties in identification. Many texts suggest that certain species cannot be safely separated in the field. Even in the hand, plumage characters are remarkably similar and potentially useful features have been cast aside, perhaps temporarily, in the face of perplexing variations from one individual to the next.

Three species are known to occur in Australia, namely Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*, Swinhoe's Snipe *G. megala* and the Pin-tailed Snipe *G. stenura*. The Common Snipe *G. gallinago* could well be recorded in the near future, as more observers look critically at snipe in the field and in the hand. It reaches the Philippines and Greater Sundas. Wood Snipe *G. nemoricola* migrate as far as Malaysia and should also be considered, likewise the rather more distinctive Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* which reaches the Andamans and Philippines.

For some years we have understood that Latham's Snipe visit the east coast of Australia and at least as far west as the Adelaide region while Swinhoe's Snipe occur regularly in the Top End and Kimberley. In recent years Pin-tailed Snipe have been netted and collected in the Pilbara.

As reported in this and previous issues (Nos. 29 and 30) of *W.A. Bird Notes*, snipe of the genus *Gallinago* have been observed on six occasions in the south of Western Australia since January 1984. No doubt this has been partly due to more man-hours spent in wetlands than in earlier decades. A snipe caught near Osborne Park in March 1984 was identified as a Pintailed Snipe, a logical extension from the Pilbara population of this species.

Unfortunately, we now realise that the distribution of snipe in Australia is more complex, denying observers the convenience (mistaken, in any case), of identifying their snipe from known distributions. Serventy and Whittell in *Birds of Western Australia* (1976 edition) list records and captures of Latham's Snipe and Swinhoe's Snipe from the Pilbara, though Storr and Johnstone in *Field Guide to the Birds of Western Australia* (1979) exclude Latham's on the grounds of mistaken identity. Further observations in the Pilbara suggest that all three species might be encountered in that region, but this must be verified by mist-netting. Probable sight records of Latham's Snipe in the Eucla division in the 1984-85 season and mist-netted specimens of Pin-tailed Snipe from near Darwin further complicate the issue.

Field guides to the Birds of South-East Asia, Japan and Hong Kong give valuable details on snipe, but only the Japanese guide gives equal comparisons between the three species which visit Australia. Furthermore, some pieces of information appear to contradict each other.

Nevertheless, using these and other references, museum skins and my own experience through confirmed sightings of four species, I have collated guidelines which should be useful.

Diagnostic field characters.

Common — white trailing upper edge to secondaries, usually conspicuous (note that the other three species may show a fine whitish edge at close range).

Latham's — in folded wing, blackish primaries extend markedly beyond brownish secondaries and tertials (little difference between primaries and secondaries in the other three species).

Beware of worn feathers and ignore relationship of wing-tip to tail-tip.

Potentially useful characters.

These are probably insufficient to confirm identification and require much careful research before they can be accepted as guiding characters.

Latham's flight — typically erupts from cover and makes a fast get-away, constantly twisting from side to side, towering to some height and covering more than 100 metres.
calls — explosive *shuk* as it leaves cover and some times again in flight; rarely silent.

