



Western Australian Bird Notes

NUMBER 36
DECEMBER 1985

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

Registered by
Australia Post
Publication No. WBH1453

**RAOU Office
in W.A.:**

Suite 30, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road (South), Canning Bridge W.A., 6153.
Telephone: (09) 364 6202

CHAIRMAN:

Miss Barbara Hale, 35 Bruce Street, Nedlands. 6009.

SECRETARY:

Miss Shapelle McNee, 466 Canning Highway, Attadale. 6156.

EDITOR:

Roger Jaensch, Field Officer, RAOU Office In W.A.

ROYAL SPOONBILLS BREED IN SOUTH-WEST

Acting on local information, two R.A.O.U. observers made casual inspections of a paperbark swamp near Mandurah in November-December 1984. These visits confirmed use of the swamp for breeding purposes by upto 40 Yellow-billed Spoonbills *Platalea flavipes* as well as other waterbirds. This was one of the largest concentrations of spoonbills reported in south-western Australia in recent years.

Further investigations from September to November 1985 have revealed more than 50 Yellow-billed Spoonbills (possibly twice that number in total) at this wetland. Counts of nests and young have led us to conclude that this is the largest recorded breeding colony for the Yellow-billed Spoonbill in Western Australia and one of the largest in Australia.

In addition, a pair of Royal Spoonbills *P. regia* commenced breeding activity at the swamp in September-October 1985. Royal Spoonbills are rare in south-western Australia, the greatest count in the Waterbird Usage Study being eight birds at the Peel Inlet Nature Reserve. We are not aware of any published breeding record for this species in south-western Australia.



Yellow-billed Spoonbills are not common in south-western Australia and Royal Spoonbills are rarely seen at all. The Royal Spoonbill wears distinctive head plumes during its breeding cycle.

The Royal Spoonbills near Mandurah had small young in one nest in October and in another nest in November. Unfortunately, both nests were quite exposed, not in the more dense paperbarks where most nests of the Yellow-billed Spoonbills were located. Some interspecific aggression between the two species of spoon-

bill was noted. Poor choice of nest site could have been a contributing factor in the failure of the nests of the Royal Spoonbills in 1985; both nests were empty well before the young could have fledged.

As always, great caution must be exercised by observers when visiting breeding colonies or single nests of any species. Ravens exploit any opportunity to raid eggs or young in nests, should parents be absent from nests for more than a few minutes.

The wetland in which the spoonbills breed is currently a reserve for the purpose of recreation, but approaches have recently been made to the authorities to have the purpose altered to conservation of flora and fauna.

SUBSCRIPTIONS DUE

Yes folks, it is our reluctant duty to inform you that subscriptions to *W.A. Bird Notes* are **DUE ON 1st JANUARY 1986**. Thanks to the cost-saving disk-to-type facilities now being used, we are able to offer the newsletter at the same price as applied in 1985.

Please send remittance for \$6.00 to:
'W.A. Bird Notes'
30/15 Ogilvie Rd,
Canning Bridge WA
6153

Remember, this fee is additional to your R.A.O.U. membership fee.

Subscribers should receive four issues of the newsletter during the year. The newsletter is usually 12 pages in length and in the past we have attempted to get it to the Post Office in the first week of March, June, September and December.

SUBS ARE DUE on 1st January 1986.

COMING MEETINGS

In 1986, more meetings will be held than in previous years. Meetings will normally be held on the fourth Monday of each month, at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre. The Centre is off Flynn Street, Wembley, near the intersection with Selby Street. Meetings will commence at 8:00 pm, though doors will generally be open soon after 7:30 pm. The June meeting will be earlier in the month than usual.

Two types of meeting have been planned for 1986. Meetings in March, June and September will have an invited speaker and a short session of business. The other ('informal') meetings will

be chaired by various people who will organise the programme around a particular topic. The last third of each 'informal' meeting will be available for members to talk about their interests, observations or trips.

Monday 20 January — Annual General Meeting for 1986

Come along and help choose the Committee of the W.A. Group for 1986. A.G.M.'s just aren't what they used to be!

Monday 24 February — informal meeting

Social gathering and slides by Murray Unkovich.

Monday 24 March — Dr Brian Collins: sunbirds

Refer to the Coming Events Calendar for dates of other meetings and to forthcoming issues of this newsletter for details.

COMING EXCURSIONS

Sunday 19 January — Mc Dougal Park

Come along for a pleasant evening stroll through a suburban park that has a surprising amount of bird life. Metrobirder surveys here have found over 20 species regularly present and a number of surprises have been recorded. Barbeques are available. Meet at the parking area along Ley St, Como at 5.30 pm. The excursion will be run by Mc Dougal Park metrobirder Joy Fleay.

Bus trip to TWERTUP, late January

This trip has been fully booked and payment is to be made by 10 January to Diane. No private vehicles by request. Inquiries: Diane 381 9035.

Saturday-Monday, 25-27 January — Busselton Area

A number of people have expressed an interest in attending a campout on the January Long-Weekend. As the Twertup trip is full, a campout in the Busselton area (possibly near Capel) has been partly organised. Interested persons should contact the RAOU Office in mid-January for final details. We might investigate birds of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste coast or count waterbirds on the Vasse Estuary.

Saturday 8 February — Neerabup/Jandabup

Both Neerabup National Park and Lake Jandabup are areas near Wanneroo (See your Road Directory) that we know little about. Neerabup contains some prime tuart forest and Lake Jandabup should have waders or other waterbirds on it in February. We invite RAOU members to explore both these areas at leisure before the excursion and inform the excursion leaders of good birding sites. Contact either Ron Van Delft (378 2161 h) or Doug Watkins (330 1038) with any information! Meet at corner of Church St and Scenic Drive, Wanneroo at 8.30 am.

Sunday 9 February — Hartfield Park

We have had many requests for an early morning excursion, so this is it! Hartfield Park is situated in a semi-rural/bushland area and has a rich bird life that can easily be seen. A small lake provides some waterbirds. Meet at 7 am at the recreation centre parking area on Morrison Rd, Forrestfield. The excursion will be run by Hartfield Park metrobirder David Row.

Sunday 23 February — Lake Gwelup

Last year this excursion was advertised in *W.A. Bird Notes* and the local papers and attracted 90 people. As Lake Gwelup is a reasonably large area, people formed into many small groups to be shown the delights of this lake. Over 40 species were recorded on that day. Meet at 4.30 pm at the junction of March and Wanstead Streets, Gwelup. The excursion will be run by Lake Gwelup metrobirder Geoff Shannon.

Saturday 8 March — Boyagin Rock

In 1986 we plan to make several visits to the absorbing Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve. The Rock is approximately 110 km ESE of the Perth G.P.O. and is reached via the Brookton Highway. The reserve contains impressive stands of powder-bark wandoo woodland and probably supports similar bird species to Dryandra Forest. One of our objectives will be to compile lists of species found at particular sites in the different seasons.

Meet just past the intersection of the Brookton Highway and Canning Road, Karragullen at 07:30 — check the March newsletter for confirmation of these details.

Sunday, 16 March — Bold Park

Bold Park encompasses some excellent bushland, as well as Perry Lakes which are renowned for their birdlife. Following an evening barbeque, this excursion will "carry on" into the night in search of nocturnal birds. Meet at 4.30 pm at the car park between Perry Lakes. Organised by Park Ranger Barry Connell and Ron Van Delft. Check details in the March newsletter. Following an evening barbeque, this excursion will carry on into the night in search of nocturnal birds. Meet at 4.30 pm at the car park between Perry Lakes.

MEETING REPORT

On 30 September, members were treated to a magnificent display of large format colour slides. The photographs were taken by Simon Nevill during a tour of northern and central Australia. Members were inspired at the beauty of famous Pilbara and Kimberley landscapes captured in the large images.

Simon also spoke about the Australasian Raptor Association, a group within the R.A.O.U. The Association produces a regular bulletin containing observations and information on raptor distribution, ecology and conservation. It also has several ongoing surveys which investigate densities of raptors, food items of raptors and such like.

Our speaker also summarised the distributions and identification of raptors in Western Australia. The meeting was well patronised and was certainly memorable.

A full report on Simon's trip is contained in the Australasian Raptor Association News, Vol. 6 No. 2 (April-June 1985).

EXCURSION REPORTS

PINNAROO VALLEY — 21 July 1985

The ominous skies of morning were clearing by the appointed meeting time and about 25 people, including some members of the W.A. Naturalists Club, were present. The display of planted native shrubs and trees, some in flower, was impressive and a walk here and across the lawns into the adjacent bush area resulted in sightings of such species as the Red-capped Parrot, Yellow-throated Miner, New Holland Honeyeater, Rufous Whistler, Great Cormorant (flying overhead), Inland and Yellow-rumped Thornbills and Grey Shrike-thrush. Some saw the Scarlet Robin. Late in the day a Western Spinebill's nest was found, the female shuffling about in it.

The two to three hours produced 30 species. Since the start of surveys for the Metropolitan Bird Project, 44 species have been seen here. Pinnaroo Valley in suburban Padbury is well worth a look.

Thanks to Rob Hill for being a leader at short notice.

Ian Standing.

PETRUDOR ROCK/MT CHURCHMAN/BIMBIJY — 31 August to 5 September 1985

More than 20 observers gathered in cold weather at Petrudor Rock, Pithara. Fifty-six species were recorded over two days. We saw Mulga Parrots, Zebra Finches, White-eared, White-fronted and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, a Black-eared Cuckoo and a Malleefowl. Jim Masters and Brice Wells made the first recorded sighting of a Spotted Pardalote in this area. This granite outcrop

with adjacent sandplain and mallee habitat met our expectations and will no doubt be worth a return visit next spring.

A local storm at Bimbij Station dampened our spirits, but drenched clothing was dried around John Malcolm's inimitable campfire. We recorded 72 species here over three days here and had good sightings of Bustards, Pied and Black Honeyeaters, Red-backed Kingfishers, a Spotted Harrier, a White-browed Treecreeper, Little Woodswallows, Cockatiels and Bourke Parrots.

A group of four people made a possible sighting of a Gilbert's Whistler in break-away scrub 2.5 km south of the homestead. Despite further searches, we failed to see the bird or hear its distinctive call again.

All enjoyed the extended look at dry area birds and some chose to return via other interesting areas such as Lake Moore, Paynes Find and the Bonnie Rock area.

D. Beckingham

PIPIDINNY — 21 September 1985

On a day which promised nothing but wet feet, chilblains, frozen ears and pneumonia, fifteen birdos gathered at the corner of Pipidinny and Yanchep Roads to discover the delights of the varied habitats that co-exist between the main road and the sea.

Dividing into two groups, one led by Brian Barrett and the other by Brice Wells, we launched simultaneous assaults on the coastal heath and the wetlands, aiming towards the tuart forest at the northern end. As we moved off the heavens opened, the wind increased in both velocity and irritability, and the next fifteen minutes are best forgotten. These conditions alternated with cold, grey, cloudy weather for the whole morning. Despite this we sighted a total of 52 species of birds and about a dozen orchid varieties. We even had a lost wallaby bound into our midst in the lunch hour.

The bird highlights included: Emus; 12 Black-tailed Native-hens (first time we've seen them here); White-winged Fairy-wrens; Spotted Scrub-wrens; White-backed Swallows; Tawny-crowned and White-cheeked Honeyeaters (does anyone know where these can be regularly seen closer to Perth?); White-winged Triller; Shining Bronze-Cuckoo; Sacred Kingfisher; Red-capped Parrot and one pair each of the Little Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel. There was also the possible sighting of a Brown Falcon.

The area is being destroyed by trail bikes and four-wheel-drive vehicles. The dunes have been cut to pieces in places. Wrecked cars are also becoming more common-place and a lot of heath was destroyed earlier in the year. In spite of this it is a superb birding location because of the variety of habitats and proximity to the city. We have a list of 95 species sighted over a four year period, despite the fact that visits over the first three years could only be described as sporadic. If anything is to be done to save the area from further despoilment it must be done soon.

Brian Barrett
Brice Wells

ROLEYSTONE RAMBLE — 12 October 1985

Approximately thirty rambblers rambled around Roleystone bird sites on 12 October. As an introduction, the first Rainbow Bee-eaters seen for the season by most observers displayed themselves while we assembled. While not high in number, birds seen during the morning were nevertheless varied.

The area we started in is notable for the Western Yellow Robin, but this proved to be a frustration. Some Robins were seen by those who ventured 'off course'. Probably the most frequently sighted birds were the Red-capped Parrot, Western Thornbill, Western Spinebill and New Holland Honeyeater. Heard more often than seen were the Striated Pardalote and Western Gerygone. Near its own nest was a Grey Shrike-thrush, and an Elegant Parrot posed conveniently on a fence. The attractive White-naped Honeyeater was also seen at the first two sites.

Elizabeth King had organised an interesting day. The four sites chosen were varied and should have offered a large number of sightings, but the weather was somewhat unkind. Our last venue was Elizabeth and Graham's home, perched high above the Can-

ning River, where we enjoyed conversation, a barbecue and opportunities for more sightings. It was felt that the chance to assemble over a sizzling steak after a morning's bushwalking would be welcomed in future by most, to rekindle energy for the long journey homewards.

Thirty-one species were seen on the day. Apart from the Coloured Sparrowhawk, Little Eagle and White-tailed Black-Cockatoos seen on John's site, observations were generally representative of those recorded on local sites for the Metropolitan Bird Project.

Rod Smith.

KARAKIN/WANERIE/GINGIN — 16-17 November 1985

This year, the sandpits south of Lancelin on K.W. Road held a surprise for us. The melancholy call of a Red-backed Kingfisher was recognised and then the bird conveniently alighted above observers' heads. White-cheeked, Tawny-crowned and Brown Honeyeaters were seen here as well as the usual numbers of White-backed Swallows. The Southern Emu-wren was glimpsed by two observers.

Karakin Lake was dry on the day but we had been forewarned. After lunch we pressed on via a 4 W.D. track to Crackers Swamp. Here Roger J. pointed out an old nest of a Buff-banded Rail and then discovered the nest and eggs of a Spotless Crake nearby. Among 28 species observed here, we particularly enjoyed watching the male White-winged Fairy-wrens.

Just south of Namegarra Rd., a Spotted Harrier was seen quite low above the highway.

Ten people stayed overnight at the lake on Wanerie Rd. and we were rewarded with a good view of a Darter and young at nest, and a young Yellow-billed Spoonbill at nest. During the circuit of the lake we flushed over 25 Rufous Night Herons from the Melaleucas and a Little Bittern from the reeds. Two eager starwatchers rose at 3 a.m. to search in vain for Halley's Comet.

On Sunday we arrived at Beermullah Lake early enough to see a good variety of waterbirds including Great Crested Grebes and numerous Musk Ducks. To the north, a Glossy Ibis was seen and some close range views were had of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Greenshanks and Red-kneed Dotterels. Those who were with us on both days saw over 85 species.

D. Beckingham

PEEL INLET — 7 December 1985

Four teams of observers censused waterbirds using the Inlet between the mouth of the Serpentine River and Sticks Channel. Nearly 4000 waterbirds of 41 species were tallied; these included the Little Egret (4), Chestnut Teal (2), Osprey (3), Eastern Curlew (4), Whimbrel (5), Bar-tailed Godwit (80), Lesser Golden Plover (1) and Gull-billed Tern (5). The area around Channel Island was particularly productive.

Moving on to the Peel Inlet Nature Reserve, observers witnessed dense mobs of ducks on the delta of the Coolup Drain and on shallow bars in the Inlet. At least 10,000 ducks were counted, most being Grey Teal or Shelducks. Thousands of distant Banded Stilts rose into the air from time to time.

The excursion was memorable both from the aspects of number of species and number of individuals seen, and data collected will prove valuable in ensuring that these important areas are protected for use by waterbirds.

R.J.

METRO BIRDER NEWS

THRESHOLD REACHED IN METRO BIRD PROJECT

The Perth Metropolitan Bird Project has reached a critical stage in fulfilling its objectives. The Project's initial aim was to gather data from Perth's parks and reserves to determine which sites have a high conservation value. To this end the project has been very successful.

Over 160 people are currently doing regular monthly surveys of their favourite birdwatching site or nearby park. By January 1985, a full twelve months of survey data will have been amassed for over 100 sites. The survey data is of particular value as Perth

is a relatively small city (pop. 1,000,000) with NO STARLINGS OR SPARROWS.

The next crucial stage in the Project is to process, analyse and **PUBLISH** the information gathered. We plan to publish a booklet 'Guide to Birdwatching in Perth' based on results from the Project. The booklet will provide descriptions of important sites, the probability of sighting the ten most common species for each site and will link sites to provide bird tours with maximum species variety.

Publishing such a booklet will raise awareness of birds and their habitats in the metropolitan area, thereby enhancing the conservation of these birds and areas.

We are currently offering page sponsorship, which is an opportunity for you to be a patron of the booklet. The Metro Bird Project Fund has been opened and it has a target of \$ 10,000. To reach this target, a donation of only \$ 5.00 would be required from each RAOU member. Page sponsorship costs \$ 50 and names of page sponsors will be credited on an appropriate page — Metro Birders have been given first preference. Those who donate \$100 ('Booklet Patrons') will be acknowledged in the front pages.

All contributions to this project are **TAX DEDUCTIBLE** and cheques should be made out to the '**Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union — Research Fund**' and listed as such on your tax return. Please send contributions to **Metro Bird Project Fund**, RAOU, 30/15 Ogilvie Rd, Canning Bridge 6153, Perth W.A.

If sufficient funding is received, highlights of analysis of the survey data will be published in the March or June edition of the National Newsletter.

METRO BIRD PROJECT UPDATE

I would like to give a preliminary 'thankyou' to all metrobirders who have undertaken monthly surveys for the Metro Bird Project. Only one more survey during the first week of January is required to complete a full year of surveys at most sites.

After January the task of processing the data and publishing the booklet, 'Guide to Birdwatching', remains to be done. The Project's Community Employment Grant was for the maximum period allowed under the scheme and funding ran out in mid October. Since then the project has been run on a voluntary basis. I currently hold a temporary (3 months) position at the City of Perth as a clerical officer.

A number of avenues are being pursued to see that the booklet guide becomes a reality. These include:

— **Fund raising.** An immense amount of work is required to enter the data into the computer, edit and verify the data, write the text for each site, write brief species outlines and to arrange the publishing generally. To help with the costs of this work, you can contribute in various ways (see above).

— **Further Community Employment Program applications.** The RAOU has applied for a grant to map the vegetation at the most important bird sites determined from the Metro Bird Project. Vegetation mapping will concentrate on mapping those aspects of the vegetation important for birds. The maps will be used in the booklet guide to birdwatching.

— **Co-operation with Government Departments.** We are currently investigating the possibility of 'selling' the Metro Bird Project data in exchange for computer analysis of the data with the Department of Conservation and Environment. Under this arrangement we still need to actually enter the data on the micro computer ourselves.

— **Seeking publishing and distribution avenues.** The University of Western Australia Press is currently costing the booklet and may offer us a contract, depending on the costing. If the booklet is published through University Press the RAOU will arrange a distribution network through its members. Commercial distributors generally quoted a fee of 25% of the recommended retail price! Newsagents also work on a similar margin, once the book is on their shelves. This means that the production price would have to be 50% of the retail price! We hope to sell the booklet for around \$5 to \$8 and would probably issue pre-publication offers.

As you can see, the project is far from finished. Unfortunately, I can not provide you with any interesting results from your surveys as we have not been entering or processing the data since September. There are many reasons for this including termination of CEP funds and the possibility of using other computer facilities which would require that all data be re-entered manually.

As a matter of interest, enquiries have recently been made to see whether government departments might support waterbird studies by the RAOU at metropolitan wetlands that may be affected by urban expansion and groundwater extraction. These concerns address the area described in the Metropolitan Region Scheme, which is a far greater area than that covered by the Metro Bird Project.

Keep up the good work.

Ron Van Delft,
Perth Metropolitan Bird Project Coordinator.

BUGS CONTAMINATE METRO BIRD PRINTOUT

To the horror of the Metro Bird Officer, strange things have been happening with his Metro Bird printout. What were penguins doing at Hollywood Reserve and why was the Black-tailed Native-hen insisting on occurring in August when the observer saw it in July? Was it the silly observers or the silly Field Officer? No, no, no, it was bugs in the programme!

One very embarrassed Metro Officer has sent the bugged programme to Melbourne. Here the computer programmer, 'whiz pest exterminator', will work on eradicating the infestation.

The Metro Officer is very sorry about the confusion and hopes to have correct printouts to participants in the near future. Until then we would suggest that the penguins holiday at the ice works and that the Black-tailed Native-hen probably found the August weather better anyway!

(Some contributors do not have a firm grasp of the Queen's English — Ed.)

NATIONAL BIRD WEEK

The week of 21-27 October was designated National Bird Week and in Western Australia we were able to arrange some displays and activities which met with varying degrees of success.

Our thanks are due to Library staff of the University of Western Australia and Murdoch University for mounting displays of bird books, and also to the State Film Centre for screening five short films on birds in the Alexander Library Theatre. This was on the Wednesday following Bird Week but it attracted an audience of more than 150, many of whom were not R.A.O.U. members. This indicates a wide public interest in birds which we will try to capitalise on by publicising our activities.

The attendance at our own screening of two R.S.P.B. videos on 21 October was disappointing and we were only just able to cover the cost of hiring the lecture theatre. This was a great pity as the videos *The Masterbuilders* and *The Language of Birds* were well worth seeing and were enjoyed by those who saw them.

The Committee was disappointed in the lack of appropriate posters for Bird Week and feels that if it is to continue as an Australia-wide event, there will have to be better national publicity and co-ordination of activities.

ROYAL SHOW

This year we once again mounted a display of R.A.O.U. projects at the Royal Show in September-October under the auspices of the Department of Conservation and Environment. We are grateful to the Department for excellent prints and artwork prepared at its own expense; these greatly enhanced our display.

Thanks to the enterprise of Margaret and Brian Wilson who organised a Christmas stall with the accent on birds, we raised funds for the W.A. Group and at the same time publicised its activities.

Many thanks to all those who helped by putting up displays and by looking after the stall.

R.A.O.U. members also acted as guides to assist D.C.E. with school groups that visited the displays after the Show.

NATIONAL TWITCHATION

Three courageous teams — one from Roleystone, one from Attadale and one from north of the river — braved the elements to compete in the 24 hour bird count for 1985. The total number of species seen was 134 with individual groups tallying 117 and 116.

The earlier time in the year and intermittent rain storms restricted the number of daylight hours left for observation, but it was felt that this was compensated by the knowledge accumulated in recent Metro Bird Walks.

The contest ended as a waterbirds list verses a bushbirds list. The waterbirds list ended up winning by one species, probably because the windy day made bush-birding more difficult. Seabirds were also good, with Bridled Tern, Arctic and Pomarine Skuas being seen.

The highlight of the day was a Ruff which was seen at Alfred Cove and was subsequently photographed by Peel Howden. Bibra Lake gave a nice bonus with Chestnut-breasted Mannikins. Migrants were back with Rainbow Bee-eaters and Sacred Kingfishers evident in many places and White-backed Swallows seen by several teams. Some species were much less conspicuous; the total raptor list comprised six species with no individual team scoring more than four. One team listed the Spotted Turtle-Dove as its 106th species; is the Laughing Turtle-Dove really more abundant in Perth than the Spotted?

Di Beckingham kindly invited the participants to recover at her house because by half past five at Kings Park the rain was pelting down. All told, a great day was enjoyed by all who participated.

John Hansen

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

MID-JULY TO MID-NOVEMBER AT EYRE

One notable feature of the winter period at Eyre was the lack of seabirds, both beach-washed casualties and live offshore occurrences. Yellow-nosed Albatrosses and Australian Gannets were only occasionally seen and no shearwaters, petrels or prions were found on the beach between mid-July and September. However, two immature Giant Petrels were close inshore on the 6th of October, together with 10 or more Fleshy-footed Shearwaters. Single beach-washed Fleshy-footed and Fluttering Shearwaters were found in mid-November.

As usual, waders provided some surprises. Sharp-tailed Sandpipers are regular in spring on our 13 km weekly beach count, but a total of 323 on the 3rd of October was five times the previous maximum count during the past six years. With extensive and continually changing banks of seaweed along the beach the Sharpies were finding plenty of food, but numbers fell dramatically in the second half of October.

The last of the few wintering Double-banded Plovers were seen on the 5th of August and a Red-kneed Dotterel at Twilight Cove on the 23rd of August was unusual. Then three Oriental Plovers were present for several days in September and a Black-tailed Godwit was seen from the 2nd to the 6th October, it being only the second seen at Eyre.

The latest new bird for Eyre was a Little Ringed Plover which I discovered at Cocklebiddy sewage ponds on the 2nd of November. This is a common and widespread species in much of Eurasia, including England, but not one which I expected to find here.

Following the two Australian Crakes at Twilight Cove on the 12th of July, one was seen again on the 5th of August and on the 12th of September. On the latter date a Baillon's Crake was also found there. This tiny crake was searching for food in banks of dry seaweed at the top of the beach near the cliff. I managed to catch it with a mist net (thrown over it!) and after banding, measuring and weighing it was released at the small fresh water pools kept open by Emus a kilometre away. This was where the Australian Crakes had previously been seen feeding. Weighing in at a mere 17.7 grams, I didn't consider the chances for sur-

vival of the Baillon's to be very high. However it or another was seen at the same pools on the 6th of October. On this occasion it was extremely fleet of foot as it dashed for cover.

Turning to land-birds, the winter invasion of Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes to the Hampton Tableland produced a loose flock of 170+ on the 18th of July. They dispersed in August and only the usual few remained into spring. Unusual occurrences in September included 25 Fairy Martins on the 7th (at one stage lined up on the radio aerial with about ten each of Tree Martins and Welcome Swallows), 20 Pied Honeyeaters on the 10th (second record for Eyre), 2 Orange Chats on the 15th and a White-cheeked Honeyeater on the 21st.

On 17th October, a Pacific Heron was seen flying east over the Observatory by two separate groups of observers. A Marsh Harrier was observed eating a Singing Honeyeater on the beach on the 18th. Both the heron and harrier were second records for Eyre.

During the Nests and Territories Course in October, an active Malleefowl mound was discovered about 2 km north-east of the Observatory, but although still being worked by the birds, participants in the Filming Wildlife Course in November didn't find the birds obliging.

Nick Dymond

FROM THE EYRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Nick Dymond and Mary Stewart are planning to return to the U.K. in early 1985.

On behalf of all the people interested in Eyre we would like to sincerely thank them both for the tremendous effort they have put into the Observatory. Running an observatory is a way of life that requires a high level of skill and personal commitment and for anyone to stay for more than a few months is a very commendable effort.

Nick has brought to Western Australia a particularly high level of professionalism in field ornithology. We are sure that some of that professionalism has rubbed off on to the visitors to Eyre and that we will all continue to gain from it in the years ahead.

We wish the best for Nick and Mary in the years to come, and of course, good birding!

EYRE COURSE PROGRAM

All courses will run from Sunday afternoon to the following Saturday morning. Cost of courses is \$150 which includes food, accommodation and transport. Families are most welcome.

Working Party — Dune Stabilisation

Date: January 1985

The work will consist of the collection of seeds and planting of *Spinifex hirsutus* and *Euphorbia paralias* under nets. Fees will be reduced to \$12 per day for adults and \$6 for children under the age of 14, plus the appropriate transport charges.

Birding for Beginners

Leader: Steve Keeling

Date: 30 March to 5 April 1985 (Easter)

The course is designed to give beginners a knowledge of how to set about identifying birds. The use and care of binoculars, note-taking in the field and proper use of reference guides and books will be covered. Activities will also include searching for the rare Eyre Throistle-toed Easter Rabbit which should be nesting at this time of year. Come along and not only learn about birds but also have fun.

RAOU WA Group Excursion to Eyre

Date: 3 to 11 May 1985

A chance for birdos from the west to go as a group to Eyre to catch up on the ever growing bird list. If you haven't been to Eyre yet — it's a must. If you have been, then here's the excuse to visit again. Special rates apply.

Eyre's Furry Friends
Leader: Doug Watkins
Date: 22 to 28 June 1985

Birds need to broaden their interests! Come to Eyre for the week and have personal introductions to some of the mammals of the southern Nullarbor and Roe Plain. Activities will include looking at cave bats and 'drift lining' for Pygmy Possums and Hopping Mice. Why stay at home!

BRIEF DETAILS OF COURSES for SECOND HALF OF 1986

History of Eyre Telegraph Station
Leader: Bill Graham
Date: July 1985

Art Workshop with Donna Reid
Date: 21 to 27 September 1985.
 Drawing and painting the unique scenery, flora and fauna of Eyre. Concentrating mainly on acrylic painting, ink and pastel.

Birds for Beginners
Date: September 28 to October 4 1985

Courses on photography and field ornithology are also planned for the second half of 1985.

For further information about the above courses, please contact the Warden at Eyre Bird Observatory. Phone: 090 393 450.



Photograph by Roger Jaensch

Exceptional numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits have been counted in Perth and at Peel Inlet in recent months. This wader has a bi-coloured, slightly upturned bill and females generally have longer bills than males.

WATERBIRD USAGE STUDIES

THE REPORT — 1981 to 1985

Progress with the Report is steady but sure. By the time you receive this blab, I should have completed first drafts for all reserves. The next task will be to tidy these up and then circulate the manuscript for comment.

I have already sought advice and critique from some observers and I might approach others in the coming month or two.

Most wetlands of appreciable area that were regularly inundated during the study have proven to be important for waterbirds in one way or another. Planning and management staff from the Department of Conservation and Land Management are already looking forward to being able to use the Report in the office and in the field. It will also be a baseline to which further observations can be compared.

I have taken note of comments that were entered on data sheets by observers. These have often been the foundation for my remarks about management issues at particular reserves.

Simple analysis of seasonal patterns in waterbird usage of wetlands in reserves has been fascinating. Data that were collected

on a monthly basis over three or four years have provided the most lucid pictures of changes in abundance of species through the seasons.

All participants in the 1981-85 study will receive complimentary copies of the Report, which will be produced by the government in a format similar in some respects to the System Six Red Book. We hope that it will be available within the first half of the coming year.

WATERBIRDS WADDLE ON!

I recently received verbal confirmation that CALM will fund waterbird studies by the R.A.O.U. in W.A. for a further three years. This will ensure continuity in current monitoring of waterbird usage of nature reserves and maintenance of the W.A. Office of the R.A.O.U..

In addition, the new initiatives outlined in the last issue of the newsletter should now come into effect. The first of these will be . . .

THE ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY (alias The Big Duck Count)

This will be a concerted search for ducks and swans (also coots?) at wetlands in southern W.A.. We hope to cover as many wetlands as possible over two weekends in late March 1986 and we expect that hundreds of volunteers and CALM staff will be involved.

Planning, publicity and recruitment will probably begin in late January. I will not be in a position to deal with responses to requests for help until that time. Information about the Big Duck Count and other new activities will be circulated in the New Year.

Roger Jaensch

OBSERVATIONS

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in R.A.O.U. Reports or in technical journals. Observers are encouraged to submit copies of field notes with all accounts of unusual sightings. The *Atlas of Australian Birds*, Serventy & Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) of the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the spring of 1985 but is less exhaustive than usual. Further records for this period should appear in the March issue of the newsletter. Shire names are given in brackets.

Please send details of sightings to 'The Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the R.A.O.U.

1. Southern W.A. (South-West & Eucla)

- Little Egret — 3 active nests in a swamp near Bunbury, 23/11.
- Little Bittern — 2, 15/11, calling at Jandabup Lake after sunset (Wanneroo).
 — 2, 23/11, Yarnup Lagoon (Cranbrook): also a fresh nest.
 — 1, 1/12, a male at Herdsman Lake (Metro).
- Australian Shelduck — 8000, 24/10, Guraga Lake (Dandaragan).
- Freckled Duck — 1, 3/9, Walbyring Lake (Wickepin).
 — 1, 24/10, Guraga Lake (Dandaragan).
 — 2, 24/10, Crackers Swamp (Dandaragan).
 — 1, 2/11, Benger Swamp (Harvey): seen on RAOU excursion; also evidence of 'camp' under tall paperbarks.
- Grey Teal — 12,000, 24/10, Guraga Lake: 28,000 waterbirds were counted.

