



Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the W.A. Group

Royal Australian Ornithologists Union

Registered by
Australia post
Publication No. WBH1453

RAOU Office

in W.A.:

CHAIRMAN:

SECRETARY:

EDITOR:

Suite 30, Rowley's Centre, 15 Ogilvie Road, Canning Bridge W.A., 6153

Telephone: (09) 364 6202

Dr. Geoff Shannon, 29 Waldemar Street, Gwelup, 6018. Telephone: 445 2417

Steve Keeling, 31 Lawnbrook Road, Walliston, 6076 Telephone 2921 7592

Bruce Buchanan, 2 Jarman Avenue, Manning, 6152

A GATHERING OF BOURKE PARROTS

The Neophema group are always a favourite with any one interested in parrots and the Bourke Parrots are probably more appealing than most. They may be seen in the drier areas of W.A.

On 20 April 1986, I made camp with a group of people in mulga country at a windmill about 20 kms east of Warburton. The countryside was very dry and had been this way for about eighteen months. Gnamma holes I knew in the area were dry. Hence my decision to stop at this watering place before dark to see what birdlife appeared. Camp was set up about 75 metres from the outlet pipe of the windmill, water from which emptied into a small earth dam.

As darkness set in and we were preparing the evening meal, two birds flew directly through our group about 1.5 metres above the ground. These I identified as Bourke Parrots, (sometimes referred to in these areas as Night Parrots). During the meal wild camels came to the dam to drink - four at first to be joined a little later by a further six. They made the most dreadful noises. During the night we were woken several times by more camels coming in to drink.

It was a warm night and while most were happy to sleep in tents, Bob Goodale and I were as usual sleeping under the stars. In pre-dawn darkness, with a faint glow of light in the

east, we were woken by the rush and whirring of hundreds of wings and the chirruping sound (similar to a flock of Budgerigars) of myriads of birds. Lying in the open wondering what was happening, we found the birds were literally brushing our faces and landing all around us. In some cases it appeared to be more a crash landing. We very quickly realised we were seeing the incredible sight of hundreds of Bourke Parrots coming to drink.

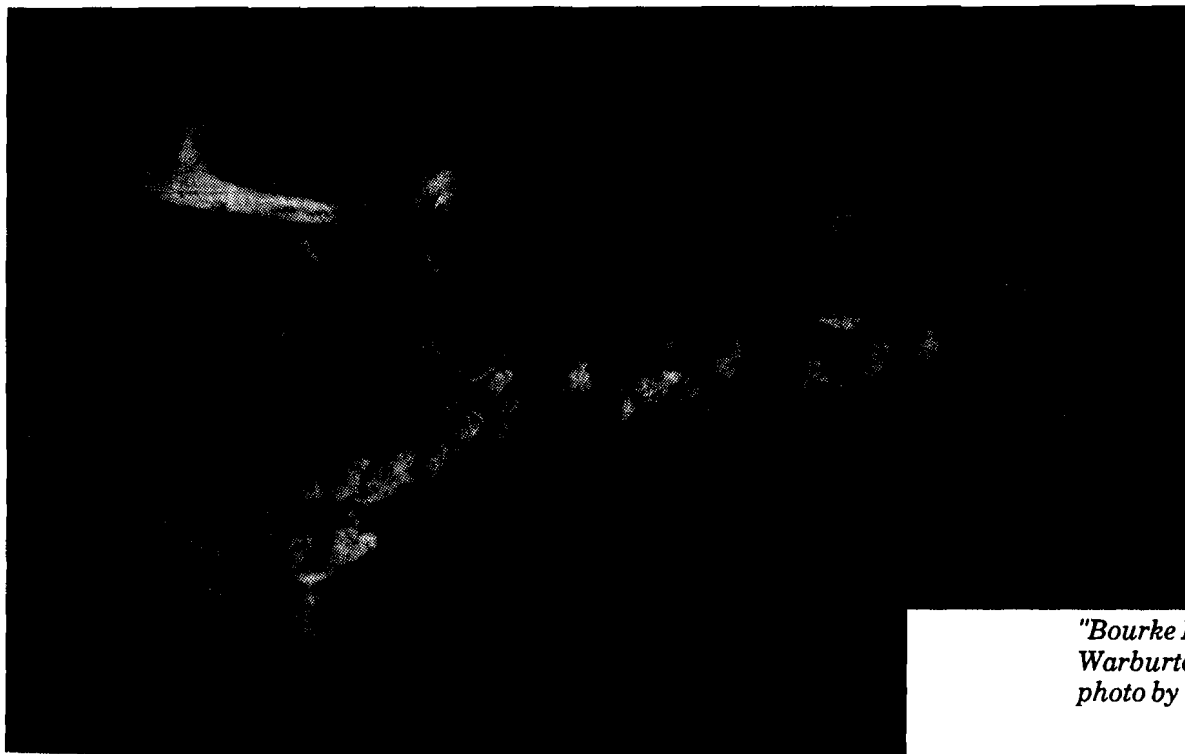
Although our bedrolls were about 100 metres from the dam some birds were landing nearby and running to the mound of the dam from this distance.

As the light became a little stronger we were able to stand near the dam and see hundreds of Bourke Parrots coming in and drinking. The ground behind the raised wall of the dam seemed to be a greyish mass of birds moving in for their turn to drink. Several small mulga trees on the dam edge were crowded. The spectacle lasted for an hour from dim light until just before the sun rose by which time virtually all the parrots had gone.

During the latter part of the visit to the dam I took some photos with the aid of a flash unit. I have been able to count some 440 birds in one shot and over 300 in several others. We estimated we saw at least 3,000 Bourke Parrots come to drink during the hour before the sun rose.

A few months later in August, after good rains throughout the centre, a birdwatching trip from Perth to Alice Springs resulted in no more than eight Bourke Parrots for the entire trip.

K. Coate



"Bourke Parrots ea.
Warburton"
photo by Kevin Coate

OBSERVATIONS

collated By Roger Jaensch and Rodney Vervest

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publication in RAOU 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 and Whittell's *Birds of Western Australia* and regional lists (e.g. Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne) by the W.A. Museum should be useful guides to records that are unusual with respect to distribution or status.

This series mainly covers the summer of 1986/87. Shire names are given in brackets. Where known, the observer is identified by an abbreviation - abbreviations are listed below.

Observations that appear in other articles in this newsletter may not be repeated here.

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

DOWN SOUTH

Great Crested Grebe - 5 pairs with young, 28/1/87, Goollelal Lake (Wanneroo) - BL

Hoary-headed Grebe - 920, 26/12/86, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale); many pairs breeding - DJ

Australian Pelican - 55, 20/10/86, Nerimba Cay, Peel Inlet: 10 on nests - AD * 12, 28/11/86, Nerimba Cay: dead young - AD

Darter - 20, 13/12/86, Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup): equal to highest count in Waterbird Usage Study 1981-1985, (250 wetlands) - RV

White-faced Heron - 120, 9/1/87, Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup) - RV

Little Egret - 10, 10/1/87, Coodanup (Mandurah) - PW

Rufous Night Heron - 1, 3/2/87, corner Alexander and Beatrice Roads, Dalkeith (Metro): a dead immature bird - RW

Little Bittern - 1, 5/12/86, Spectacles Swamp (Metro): heard calling - RJ, PC * 1, 28/1/87, Goollelal Lake (Wanneroo) - BL

Black Bittern - 2, December 1986, Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo): report from far S end of lake - MHB

Australasian Bittern - 4, 2/11/86, Charsley's Swamps, E of Esperance: 4 calling birds - RV, RJ * 1, 28/11/86, calling in swamp SE of Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup) - RV * 1, November 1986, Vasse Estuary (Busselton): in low

rushland at W end of estuary - RJ * breeding, December 1986, Lake Pleasant View (Albany) - TB

Straw-necked Ibis - 1000-1500 pairs breeding, 8/12/86, West Corio Swamp (Murray) - PRH

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 29/11/86, Nambung Lake (Gingin) - BB, AB

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 37, 15/3/86, Fitzes Swamp (Kojonup) - WJM

Wandering Whistling-Duck - 1, 2/1/87, Perry Lakes South (Metro) -

Freckled Duck - 10, 3/11/86 and 1/1/87, Nambarup Swamps (Esperance): paperbark thickets - RV, RJ * 10 (9 males), 5/11/86, Tyrell's Yate Swamp (Esperance): not breeding in this swamp - RV, RJ * 2, 6/11/86, Jerdacuttup Lake (Ravensthorpe): in dense thickets; this lake was deeply flooded in 1986 - RV, RJ * 2, 7/11/86, Yellilup Swamp (Jerramungup): in flooded yates - RV, RJ * 3, 5/12/86, Spectacles Swamp (Metro) - RJ, PC * 2, 1/1/87, Coomalbidup Swamp: Yate Swamp W of Esperance - RJ

Australian Shelduck - 11 782, 30/11/86, Lake Clifton (Mandurah) - MHB * 12 000, 22/11/86, Lake Gore (Esperance) - JE

Grey Teal - 10,000, 27/12/86, Vasse Estuary (Busselton) - RJ

Chestnut Teal - pair with 8 young (3 weeks old), 6/11/86, Jerdacuttup Lake (Ravensthorpe) - RV, RJ

Hardhead - adult with eleven young (10 days old?), 6/11/86, Jerdacuttup Lake (Ravensthorpe) - RV, RJ * 310, 23/11/86, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

Maned Duck - 179, 14/12/86, Chittering Lake (Chittering) - BK

Blue-billed Duck - 1/11/86, Mortijinup Lake (Esperance): nest with eggs in a tussock - RV, RJ * 121, 7/12/86, Mongers Lake (Metro): with young - NB

Square-tailed Kite - 1, 27/12/86, near Brookton: being chased by a Little Eagle - MiB, MaB * 1, 3/1/87, 30 kms S Coolgardie - MiB, MaB * 1, 26/1/87, in jarrah forest about 20 kms SE Harvey - Mib, MaB

Collared Sparrowhawk - 2, 13/12/86, Bungendore Park (Metro): a pair nesting in jarrah tree - BBa, MC, ND

Peregrine Falcon - 1, 30/12/86, Vasse Estuary (Busselton) - BK

Buff-banded Rail - parents with chicks, late December, Alfred Cove (Metro) - MM * 3, 18/1/87, Swan River (between Maylands Jetty and peninsular): one adult with 3 downy young - BK

Baillon's Crake - 1, 14/11/86, Cracker's Swamp (Dandaragan): in low shrubs with a fine rush - BB, RJ * 1, 26/12/86, SW of Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

Spotless Crake - 1, 3/10/86, Westfield Park Primary School swamp (Kelmescott) - GM * 6, 26/12/86, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

Painted Snipe - 3, 29/11/86, Bambun Lake (Gingin) - BB, AB

Pied Oystercatcher - 13, 4/1/87, Swan foreshore at Dalkeith - PB

Lesser Golden Plover - 31, 31/12/86, Rushy Point, Little Grove (Albany) - MN * 2, 21-23/1/87, Carnarvon: in company with Bar-tailed Godwits and Banded Lapwings on oval - GS

Hooded Plover - 20, 3/11/86, Pink Lake (Esperance) - RV * 1, 6-14 December 1986, swamp near Wannamal - BB, AB

Large Sand Plover - 10, 31/12/86, Rushy Point, Little Grove (Albany) - MN * 2, 10/1/87, Creery Island (Mandurah) - PW

Eastern Curlew - 3, 22/12/86, mouth of Preston River (Bunbury) - RP * 7, 10/1/87, Creery Island (Mandurah) - PW

Whimbrel - 1, 21/11/86, Alfred Cove (Metro) - PRH * 2, 22/12/86, mouth of Preston River (Bunbury) - RP

Wood Sandpiper - 64, 30/1/87, McLarty Lake (Murray): highest count in S of State - RV, RJ * 2, 31/1/87, near Wannamal Swamp - BB, AB

Grey-tailed Tattler - 2, 22/12/86, mouth of Preston River (Bunbury) - RP

Common Sandpiper - 4, 19/10/86, Yealering Lake nr. Yealering - PBr

Gallinago (Pin-tailed ?) Snipe - 1, 23/1/87, Bibra Lake (Metro): diminutive bird, direct but laboured flight; a few weak calls - MCr

Black-tailed Godwit - 1, 10/1/87, Coodanup - PW

Bar-tailed Godwit - 456, 10/1/87, Coodanup - PW

Great Knot - 18, 21/1/87, Wilson Inlet (Denmark): first in this area - LB

Long-toed Stint - 49, 30/1/87, McLarty Lake (Murray): average summer count over 4 years = 45 - RV, RJ

Broad-billed Sandpiper - 1, 24/10/86, Goegrup Lake (Murray): probably this species; feeding with Red-necked Stints - AD * 1, 22/12/86, mouth of Preston River - RP * 1, 14/1/87, E end Wilson Inlet: standing amongst Red-necked Stints - LB * 1, 29/1/87, Freeway foreshore, South Perth: caught by Wader Study Group.

Ruff - 1, 25/1/87, Wannamal Lake (Gingin): first record north of Perth? - JL * 2, 30/1/87, McLarty Lake (Murray) - RV, RJ

Red-necked Phalarope - 1, 25/11/86, Lake Hinds (Wongan-Ballidu): first south-west record away from Perth area - OM

Oriental Pratincole - 1, 30/1/87, McLarty Lake (Murray) - RV, RJ

White Winged Tern - 16, 24/11/86, Vasse Estuary (Busselton) - RJ

Fairy Tern - 57, 18/12/86, artificial Boat Harbour, Mandurah: 10 birds on nests; colony increased to about 80-100 breeding pairs by mid-January - AD, DGW
Crested Pidgeon - 2 chicks, 1/2/87, 45 kms W Cranbrook: breeding record; birds extending their range west. - DGW
Purple-crowned Lorikeet - flock of 5000+, 9/2/87, Byenup Lagoon (Manjimup): one flock moving NW - BH
Regent Parrot - 2, 12/11/86, Red Gum Pass (Stirling Ranges): reported nesting in a wandoo tree - RSm
Cockatiel - 1, 2/11/86, Centre Rd, Kelmscott: male bird - GM
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo - 1, 6/12/86, Yangebup Lake (Metro): young bird being fed by two Yellow-rumped Thornbills - BBa, MC, ND
Tawny Frogmouth - 1, 31/10/86, Havelock St, West Perth: juvenile on lawn outside building - MHB * 1, 13/12/86, Bungalow Park (Armadale) - BBa, MC, ND
Fork-tailed Swift - 48, 8/1/86, Eyre Bird Observatory - RS
Tree Martin - 1000+, 16/1/87, Alfred Cove (mostly on the sports ground) - RS
Crested Shrike-tit - 1, 12/11/86, Donnelly River Mill - RS * 1, 28/12/86, Minvolara Swamp (near Bremer Bay) - BB, AB
Western Whipbird - 1, 10/12/86, Anderson Lake (Tambellup) - MGr
Rufous Songlark - 2, 30/12/86, Forrestfield (Metro) - RS
White-fronted Chat - 100+, 11/1/87, in paddock off Gnaragarra Rd, (Wanneroo) - GS
Little Crow - 38, 11/1/87, lake Wannamal (Gingin): flying high and calling, moving S - DGW

UP NORTH

Black Bittern - 1, 29/11/86, Bell Gorge - BW, GH
Grey Falcon - 1, 29/11/86, Bell Gorge - BW, GH
Oriental Plover - 1, 19/9/86, 30 km SE of Camp 'Nifty', 60 km W of Telfer - JBr
Roseate Tern - 12, 23/11/86, Barred Creek (N of Broome) - BW, GH
Barn Swallow - 1, 16/11/86, Camp 'Nifty': exploration camp 60 km W of Telfer - JBr * 130+, November, Lake Eda, E of Broome - BW, GH

AB - Anne Buchanan	MM - Michael Morecombe
AD - Austin Daw	MN - Margaret Nash
BB - Bruce Buchanan	NB - Norah Brockman
BBa - Bryan Barrett	ND - Norma Duff
BH - Bessell Hanekamp	OM - Otto Mueller
BL - Barbara Longmuir	PC - Pauline Clay
BW - Brice Wells	PB - Phyllis Bentley
DGW - Doug Watkins	PBr - Phillip Brace
DJ - David James	PRH - Peel Howden
GH - Gail Hooper	PW - Peter Wilmot
GM - Greg Marston	RJ - Roger Jaensch
GS - Geoff Shannon	RP - Ross Payton
JBr - John Brooke	RS - Rod Smith
JE - Jack Ewert	RSm - Ray Smith
JL - Jim Lane	RV - Rodney Vervest
LB - Lola Broadhurst	RW - Rosemary Whish-Wilson
MaB - Mandy Bamford	TB - Tony Bush
MC - Marjory Clegg	WJM - Dusty Millar
MGr - Michael Craig	WZ - Wayne Zadow
MHB - Mal Graham	
MiB - Mike Bamford	

JULIAN FORD 1932 - 1987

Julian Ralph Ford was one of the leading ornithologists both in Australia and internationally. While a less frequent visitor to meetings of recent years he had a long association with WA birding. He was Secretary of the RAOU in WA for eight years, Secretary of the WA Naturalists Club for two years and State organiser of the Australian Bird Banding Scheme for ten years. He organised the RAOU Australasian Congress in Perth in 1961.

Julian graduated in physical and organic chemistry from the University of Western Australia in 1955 and commenced work as a chemist in private industry. In 1960 he joined the staff of Perth Technical College and later became one of the early members of the staff of WAIT when he joined their Department of Chemistry in 1968.

Julian was able to use his chemistry knowledge in his bird studies, particularly in problems relating to the pigmentation of feathers and in the application of biochemical approaches. His work was primarily concerned with the speciation, hybridisation, origins and evolution of Australian birds. He introduced innovative techniques and methodologies which have since been adopted by other workers in the field. His work on sibling species, hybrid zones, the speciation mechanisms of arid zone birds and Australian mangrove avifauna were outstanding. He pointed to a habitat bridge north of the Nullarbor plain connecting South-West WA and Eyre Peninsular birds and new speciation concepts. In many ways his work was ahead of others in the field. His conclusions have been convincing and have not been criticised in the scientific literature.

His work brought him national and international recognition. Regarded as one of the most able of evolutionary biologists in Australia he was the first Australian ever to receive the Frank Chapman Fellowship of the American Museum of Natural History in 1976.

In 1982 Julian was invited to become a Corresponding Fellow of the American Ornithologists Union, a recognition limited to 75 recipients world wide and limited to four in Australia. Julian was awarded a PhD in 1983 in Zoology by the University of Western Australia.

Julian not only set high standards for his students (about which some protested) but for himself, as his achievements testify. Having travelled widely in all parts of Western Australia and bringing considerable knowledge and expertise to many bird topics, Julian was never afraid to put forward his views boldly and forcibly. He occasionally had the impatience of the person with great knowledge for those of lesser stature. As a result not all found Julian a comfortable colleague. However, he was always open to modify his views, was never pretentious and often almost shy. He grew on those who came to know him.

Scientific ornithology has lost a great leader. His published work, over 130 scientific refereed papers, will stand as a fitting memorial which will continue to influence and guide ornithology for many years.

COMMITTEE 1987

Chairman
 Vice Chairman
 Secretary
 Treasurer
 Members

Geoff Shannon
 Ros Denny
 Steve Keeling
 Clive Napier
 Mandy Bamford
 Barbara Hale
 John Hansen
 Allan Jones
 Ian Standring
 Brian Wilson

Sub-committee Conveners

Trading
 Conservation
 Research
 Membership
 Meetings
 Publications

Clive Napier
 Brian Wilson
 Mandy Bamford
 Ros Denny
 Ian Standring
 John Hansen

WATERBIRD STUDIES

RAOU SURVEY OF EGRET COLONIES

Many thanks to all those who contributed information for this important survey. Special appreciation should be given to Judy Jenkins who helped with coordination and publicizing. Judy also arranged an aerial survey through which a new colony of Great Egrets was found.

This season five known colonies of the Great Egret were discovered to be inactive. These were Toolibin Lake (Shire of Wickepin), Tyrell's Yate Swamp (E of Esperance), a swamp near Lake Gore (Esperance), Chandala Swamp (Chittering) and a swamp W of Wokalup (Harvey). Five active colonies were found to have established at Ludlow Swamp (Busselton; 40-45 pairs), Australind (Australind Egret Swamp; 15-20 pairs), S of Pinjarra (30-40 pairs), West Corio Swamp (N of Pinjarra; 8 pairs) and at the South Perth Zoo (10-15 pairs). West Corio Swamp was not previously known and was found also to include a colony of between 1500-2000 pairs of Straw-necked Ibis. This was a result of the aerial survey - the birds, especially egrets being obvious from the air. Colonies S of Pinjarra and at the South Perth Zoo were not widely known.

Many potential egret breeding sites were investigated, i.e. tall paperbark swamps between Perth and Bunbury and yate swamps between Albany and Esperance. Given that some active colonies occurred in small swamps (less than 1-2 hectares), other colonies may still be discovered among the numerous small wetlands that occur in the aforementioned regions.

Three pairs of the Little Egret were found breeding in a paperbark swamp S of Pinjarra. This is a new breeding locality for the species. Australind Egret Swamp is the other known colony in the south of the State but Little Egrets did not breed there during the 1986-87 season. This species bred at Australind in each of the three previous years.

Of the five active colonies of Great Egrets in 1986-87, only one was in a nature reserve (Australind Egret Swamp Nature Reserve). Most colonies are threatened in some way by either death of paperbarks (Ludlow Swamp), clearing (West Corio) or chemical pollution (Australind).

During 1987-88 we will monitor breeding at the ten known localities and attempt to discover new colonies particularly in the Albany and Esperance districts.

REMOTE WETLAND EXPEDITION

No doubt readers will recall the Remote Wetland Expedition to Lakes Argyle and Gregory in August 1986 (reported in Western Australian Bird Notes No. 40 and the December issue of the National Newsletter). Nearly half a million waterbirds of 66 species were counted at these wetlands by 13 observers.

In 1987, we plan to investigate another 'remote wetland', possibly Lake McLeod (N of Carnarvon). Lake McLeod is supplied by seepage of underground sea-water and by intermittent rivers and is known to sometimes support large numbers of waders.

Details are yet to be finalised for the '87 Expedition but it will probably go ahead around August/September. Please keep this opportunity in mind when planning your leave etc... check the June issue of Bird Notes for details.

REGULAR MONITORING

Waterbird data sheets have continued to arrive since May 1985. The efforts of all observers who have continued monitoring and those who have initiated monitoring at other wetlands are thankfully acknowledged. The RAOU's waterbird data-bank has become an effective tool in waterbird conservation. Data for the 18 month period to December 1986 have been processed and will soon be entered onto computer: approximately 500 individual surveys covering 160 wetlands are represented.

Copies of the summary print-out of this data will be made available as soon as possible.

In building up this data-bank on waterbird usage of wetlands throughout the south-west of Western Australia we are keen to incorporate counts from any wetland in the region. Comparisons between wetlands will be most effective if more wetlands are incorporated in the data-bank.

A report of the Regular Monitoring programme will be prepared during 1987 concentrating on wetlands (reserve and non-reserve) that are important and threatened. Other wetlands may be given a less detailed treatment.

GREAT DUCK COUNT 1987

Many nature reserves, and some sites not in reserves, were confirmed as important for waterfowl (ducks, swans and coots) during the Waterbird Usage Study (1981-85). The Department of Conservation and Land Management and the RAOU recognised the value of annual monitoring at a sample of wetlands throughout the south-west of Western Australia and inaugurated the 'Great Duck Count' in March 1986. This was based on two objectives:

1. to monitor annual changes in populations of waterfowl in Western Australia, and
2. to identify sites that are important as refuges for waterfowl.

During the period 8-16 March 1986, 870 wetlands were investigated by over 140 observers in the south-west of Western Australia. Thirteen remote wetlands (i.e. in the North and East sectors of the State) were also included. In excess of 106 000 swans and ducks and a total of 17 000 Eurasian Coots were tallied. The significance of these results may become apparent after a series of annual counts has been completed.

In 1987, the Great Duck Count will be held from 7-15 March

Our aims in 1987 will be to achieve the two major objectives and, as a result of the previous Great Duck Count, a further set of detailed objectives:

1. to involve many more observers and thereby increase the number of wetlands surveyed. For the 1987 GDC we hope to involve up to 250 observers;
2. to achieve the best possible percentage of repeat surveys of sites surveyed in the 1986 GDC. (The extent of rainfall in 1986 will affect distribution of waterfowl and therefore selection of some sites to be surveyed in 1987);
3. to survey 'new' wetlands (particularly those that are 'known' to be holding water this season);
4. to survey sites that could provide refuges for Chestnut Teal. The tally for this species was low in the 1986 GDC.

We anticipate that regular volunteers will form the backbone of the 1987 GDC. In addition many more observers, particularly from the country, will be encouraged to participate. We ask that 'experienced' duck counters encourage newcomers to participate. Some observers may wish to act as regional organizers in building a network of Great Duck Counters.

Previous experience with counting is not essential for participation in the GDC.

It is important, however, that total counts are achieved for swans, ducks and coots. Wetlands covered should be within the observer's ability to achieve the most accurate results.

The data forms will probably be as for the 1986 GDC. These are simple and easy to use for both observer and organizer. Preliminary results will be forwarded to all observers early after the completion of the Count.

Assuming this issue of Bird Notes reaches you by the 1st March, 1987, there will still be an opportunity for you to be involved in this interesting and enjoyable event.

Please contact Rodney Vervest at the RAOU office NOW and indicate

- * your address, phone number
- * preference for particular wetland (if any)
- * if willing to be directed to a wetland and distance prepared to travel.

REMAINS OF OLDEST KNOWN BIRD

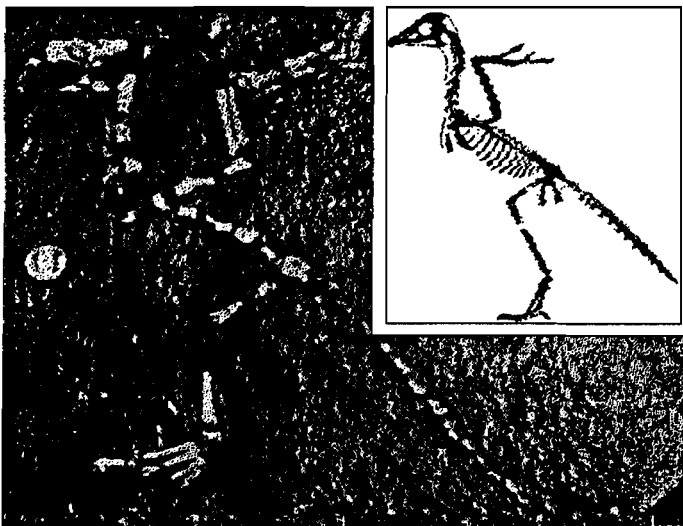
The remains of the oldest known bird, a crow-sized creature that lived 225 million years ago, have been unearthed in western Texas by scientists at Texas Tech University.

The researchers excavated two specimens of the bird from a mudstone quarry near the small town of Post. An associate professor of geology who headed the team, said the remains were 75 million years older than *Archaeopteryx*, a strange part-bird, part-reptilian creature that until now was considered to be the oldest bird.

The discovery - a new genus that will be named *Protoavis*, for "ancestral bird" - is more birdlike in appearance than *Archaeopteryx* whose remains were discovered over a century ago in a limestone quarry in Bavaria.

The professor said he believed *Protoavis* could hear and communicate with others of its kind, could fly short distances, and might have had brilliant plumage for camouflage in the forests. Like *Archaeopteryx*, he added, the juvenile and adult skeletons of *Protoavis* that were unearthed exhibited prominent reptilian features, such as clawed fingers, a tail, and teeth. Modern birds are toothless.

Compared to *Archaeopteryx*, *Protoavis* appeared to be more advanced on the evolutionary scale because its bones were more birdlike than those of *Archaeopteryx* and because it had lost the teeth in the back part of its jaw.



Remains of oldest known bird

The Chronicle of Higher Education September 3, 1986

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

The year 1986 finished as one of the best in the nine years that the Observatory has been operating. The number of visitor nights was 1,128 almost 10% higher than the previous highest.

Financially the year was also the most successful to date. In January we were able to purchase the vehicle that we have been dreaming of for the last five years - a Hilux Dual-cab 4WD. The Hilux, which cost \$12,800, is a 1983 diesel model with 50,000km on the clock. It can comfortably carry five people inside and their gear on the back. 'Tommy' will be retired after giving us six years of faithful service.

Rob and Jan Hill will be returning to Perth in mid-February. The success of the Observatory in 1986 owes much to their efforts and hospitality. We thank you, Rob and Jan, for all that you have put in and look forward to seeing you again at meetings and excursions.

NEW WARDENS

The new Wardens for Eyre are Gail Hooper and Brice Wells. Gail and Brice will be known to many members of the Group as they have been active 'birders' in W.A. over recent years. If you haven't seen them around for a while it's because over the past year they have been enjoying the splendours of the Kimberleys. Be WARNED after your next visit to Eyre they will have convinced you that the next place you have to go birding is the Kimberleys!

'DELETED' COMMON BRONZEWING BACK AT EYRE

The identification of Common Bronzewing at Eyre has been a problem over the years. In the first Eyre Bird Observatory Report they were 'rare; single birds'. By the third Report their status had become 'The early records of the species are probably errors. The species is thus deleted'.

It is with pleasure that I (along with at least two Common Bronzewing), report that they do occur at Eyre. During some hot weather in mid-January 1987, the said 'deleted' birds were seen in the company of Brush Bronzewing coming to drink at the water tray on the underground tank. Back on the list they go!

THE WADER STUDY GROUP

The most important news from the WA WSG is that banding activities have recommenced around Perth. Our first evening netted only seven Red-necked Stints, but we hope that future evenings will be more successful. Banding will be carried out approximately every fortnight at sites such as Pelican Point and Alfred Cove and all interested persons are welcome to join us. Please call Mike Bamford (444 0482) to find out when and where the next banding evening will be.

There are two interesting recoveries to report; one local and one far afield. A Great Knot, banded in August 1982 on Eighty-Mile Beach, was recaptured by researchers from the East China Normal University, Shanghai, in April 1984. It can take some time for information like this to get back to us. A much less ambitious Black-winged Stilt, banded at Pelican Point in 1981, was found dead at the Bayswater Bird Sanctuary by Eric Singleton a few weeks ago. After six years the band was so worn as to be almost illegible. This Black-winged Stilt recovery illustrates the value of taking a closer look than you might like at dead birds.

We recently visited the Freeway Foreshore (just south of the Narrows) where large numbers of waders had been reported roosting in the afternoons. We saw about 3,000 birds mostly Red-necked Stint, 10 Red-capped Plover and one Broad-billed Sandpiper, a species rarely seen on the Swan River.

Of the Red-necked Stints, 12 were recaptures, all originally banded by the WA WSG on the Swan River. One of these had a minimum age of 13 years. Another interesting feature of the catch was that only 13 of the Stints were first year birds (juveniles). In previous years, first year birds have made up 30-40% of our catches.

If you were one of the many people involved in the wader count programme, the data you collected has contributed to the soon-to-be-available book, Shorebirds in Australia (author Brett Lane). Pre-publication offers have already been distributed with an earlier WA Bird Notes. The book brings together the current state of our knowledge of shorebirds. Incidentally, I'm not sure why the collective term "shorebirds" has been used in place of the more familiar "waders". Instead of having to explain to people that herons aren't waders, we will now also have to convince them that Silver Gulls aren't shorebirds! However, shorebirds is the fashionable term overseas just now and by whatever name they are called are a fascinating group of birds. This book will make a valuable addition to any birdo library.

M. Bamford

This is the first of a series of short articles to assist with sea-bird identification of the *Mollymawk* group.

YELLOW-NOSED ALBATROSS, *Diomedea chlororhynchos*

This is the smallest form in the group of albatrosses known as Mollymawks and is the most common albatross found close to land about Western Australia's coast. As with all albatrosses, the nostrils lie outside and to the side of the culminicorn. This is a diagnostic feature if you should find a beach-washed bird. Comparison with the bill profiles given inside the cover of *The Birds of Australia*, (Simpson & Day) is recommended.

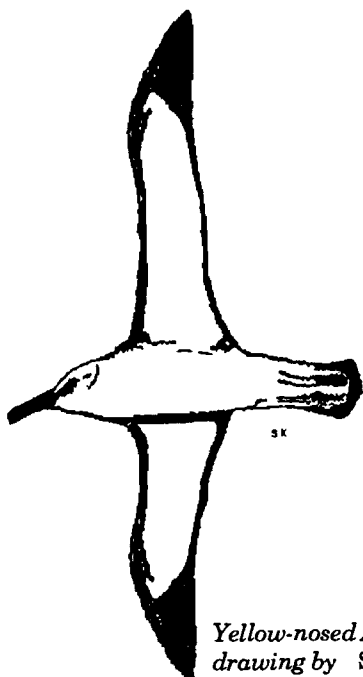
Field identification should be based on the underwing pattern. This is quite distinctive - mainly white except for black primaries and narrow margins with the leading edge broadest. Bill colour is black with a yellow culminicorn and, if seen, is a diagnostic feature. The juvenile bird shows little yellow on the bill. The bird is noticeably smaller than the Shy Albatross and this, with its black bill, should make separation possible. Black-browed Albatross have thick dark underwing emargination and the adult has a pale bill.

There are two subspecies with *chlororhynchos* being confined largely to the South Atlantic and *bassi* to the southern Indian and Pacific oceans. *D. chlororhynchos* has a grey head whereas *bassi* is largely white. Of all the albatrosses the Yellow-nosed favours warmer waters and is found well into the tropics. It may be seen off the southern coast of WA throughout the year but is most common between April and November.

In the southern Indian Ocean *D. chlororhynchos bassi* breeds at St Paul, Amsterdam, Prince Edward Island and the Crozets. Juvenile birds seem to disperse widely and do not breed during the first five years or more. Adult birds may be more sedentary and breeding is a long business with the cycle lasting 8 months. Adults share nest building - the female does the construction whilst the male fetches material. Both birds share incubation and rearing of the young.

Like other albatrosses it is a long lived bird with one bird being recorded to be some thirty-seven years of age.

S. Keeling



Yellow-nosed Albatross: Race *bassi*
drawing by S. Keeling

ART EXHIBITION - AUGUST 14-19

The 1987 Art Exhibition will be held in The Perth Concert Hall on the above dates.

Prospective exhibitors may obtain forms for the submission of entries from the RAOU office; 30/15 Oglivie Road, Canning Bridge. Tel. 364 6202.

In order to mount and produce another successful exhibition the help of members is required. Please inform the RAOU office if you are willing to give assistance with any or all of the following tasks:-

Supper for the opening function
Display/hanging on 13 August
Dismantling of exhibition 19 August
Preparation of invitations

Sale of art works and other materials - persons are required for mornings, afternoons and evenings of each day of the exhibition from Friday 14 August to Wednesday 19 August inclusive.

NEWS CUTTINGS NEEDED

News cuttings from local papers and copies of Press releases are filed in a Scrapbook at the RAOU office. If you can supply any for 1986 please drop them in to the office. Please collect cuttings during 1987.

BIRDLISTS NEEDED

We would like to maintain Birdlists at the RAOU office, as comprehensive as possible, for country birding spots. These can be provided to interested persons. Please help by supplying copies of past lists from your personal records. If you have a lot of such material, please send a list of places for which you can provide a birdlist.

LAKE MEALUP PRESERVATION SOCIETY INC.

Lake Mealup in Murray Shire is close to the Harvey Estuary. It is an important wetland for waterbirds and waders and is one of the few wetlands in the coastal plain near Perth that has not been significantly altered by agriculture, drainage etc. The Lake Mealup Preservation Society currently owns about 100 hectares of the Lake Mealup area. It aims to restore and conserve the Lake as a wildlife sanctuary and to purchase further areas when able. Other aims are to foster research in wetlands and increase community awareness of their value.

The Society has both Full and Associate membership. If you wish to give support to the worthy aims and projects of the Society please contact Jock McLaren or Chris Judges (381 6120) or the RAOU office.

MEMBERS' CONTRIBUTIONS

THE BIG SWAMP BIRD PARK

On September 14 1986, Dr Stephen Davies, Director of the RAOU, officially opened the Big Swamp Bird Park, revealing a plaque to commemorate the culmination of six years of planning, scheming and plain hard work by the S.W. Avicultural Society and friends at the Bunbury City Council.

The idea of the bird park was first mooted in 1980 when the Council was planning to turn a 60 ha. swamp area into a public recreation ground after filling about three quarters of it with town rubbish. A large section of swampland remains with reeds and low shrub. There are several pools, where waterfowl abound in many species and great numbers. The surrounding area has been grassed, trees and flowerbeds have been planted and contain a wide variety of native

