



# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the W.A. Group

**Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union**

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

**In W.A.:** Telephone: (09) 364 6202

**CHAIRMAN:** Dr. Geoff Shannon, 29 Waldemar Street, Gwelup, 6021. Telephone: 445 2417

**SECRETARY:** Steve Keeling, 31 Lawnbrook Road, Walliston, 6076. Telephone: 291 9561

**EDITOR:** Bruce Buchanan, 2 Jarman Avenue, Manning, 6152

**RAOU BIRDING HOTLINE 364 7349**

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## **WATERBIRDS AT LAKE MACLEOD & SHARK BAY W.A.**

### **Preliminary report of the RAOU Expedition 28 September - 9 October 1987 Lake MacLeod (100km N of Carnarvon)**

The geological features which subsequently led to the creation of Lake MacLeod were formed 1.8 million years ago. The essential features are porous limestone-like rocks tilted downwards from the coast towards the Lake.

While fresh water creeks and the Gascoyne River in infrequent overflow run into the Lake the water levels are maintained for most of the year by sea water seeping through the rocks and welling up in the Lake. One such upward flow was observable close to the camp site of the Lake MacLeod RAOU expedition. The expedition was organised to

endeavour to find out whether Lake MacLeod was a significant place for migratory waders and other non-migratory and waterbird species. Although formed perhaps a million years ago, it was not until 1987 that a thorough attempt to survey Lake MacLeod from a bird viewpoint was attempted.

The 14 RAOU observers who braved the wind, salt and mud at Lake MacLeod (28/9 - 3/10/87) were privileged to witness spectacular concentrations of waders. Dense swarm-like flocks, each comprising several thousand waders, rose off the mudflats during each day in response to the movement of shallow water back and forth by the changeable winds.

The mud had an awesome reputation from the reports of previous geological teams reputedly, being of a bottomless quicksand type. As a result initial parties of observers were roped together mountaineering style for mutual safety. In wetter times the sand and mud may be less secure and after it was found no-one seemed to sink beyond the knees, ropes were abandoned. The only other hazard was the discovery that the roots of the fringing mangroves grow over deep water. One of the party had the misfortune to go through into the water to the detriment of binoculars (and the information of all.)



*Banded Stilt At Lake Macleod*

*Photo by Roger Jaensch*

A total of 115,000 waterbirds of 53 species was realised from surveys at the Lake and 111,600 of these birds (27 species) were waders (see table below). The most abundant species were Banded Stilt (53,100), Curlew Sandpiper (41,600) and Red-necked Stint (8300). Large numbers of the Red Knot and Red-necked Avocet were also counted. Rarer species sighted included the Asian Dowitcher, Broad-billed Sandpiper and Mongolian Plover. Some of the other waterbirds recorded were, 96 Little Egrets, five Striated Herons, five cormorant species and six tern species. A few pairs of Darter and Little Pied Cormorant were breeding in the mangroves and 35 pairs of Caspian Terns and 98 pairs of Fairy Terns had eggs or young on the bare lake shore.

Twenty-three of the species observed at Lake MacLeod are given international protection by the Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement (JAMBA).

Non-waterbird/wader sightings at the Lake were Wedge-tailed Eagle, Australian Hobby (nesting on one of the small islands in the Lake), Australian Kestrel, Budgerigar, White-backed Swallow, Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin, Fairy Martin, Richard's Pipit, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, Grey Fantail, Chiming Wedgebill, Variegated and White-winged Fairy-wren, Calamanthus, Dusky and Mangrove Gerygone, Slender-billed Thornbill, Singing Honeyeater, Orange Chat, Yellow White-eye, White-breasted Woodswallow and Australian Raven. (23 species)

### Shark Bay (S of Carnarvon)

Another group of 14 RAOU observers conducted surveys by light aircraft, boat, motor-bike and foot at selected portions of Shark Bay from 4/10-9/10/87. Despite strong winds and limited access for motor vehicles, surveys were undertaken of those portions of the Bay with the greatest potential to support waders.

A total of 34,600 waterbirds of 53 species was recorded from the surveys of Shark Bay and 25,100 of these birds (28 species) were waders. Abundant species in the sample of birds identified in ground surveys (see table below) included the Bar-tailed Godwit (1580), Red-necked Stint (850) and Curlew Sandpiper (840) while more than 7000 Pied Cormorant and 8600 Banded Stilt were recorded in aerial surveys. Rarer species sighted included Oriental Plover, Little Curlew and Mongolian Plover. Other waterbirds counted included 34 Little Egrets, 57 Gull-billed Terns and 17 Roseate Terns.

Twenty-five of the species observed at Shark Bay are given international protection by JAMBA.

### Discussion

Only five other sites in Australia are known to support more than 100,000 waders. The expedition has therefore shown that Lake MacLeod is of high national importance for waders. It is also likely that Lake MacLeod and Shark Bay each support more than 20,000 waders each year and are therefore of international importance for waterbirds (RAMSAR Convention).

In the national context, the counts of 53,100 Banded Stilts and 41,600 Curlew Sandpipers at Lake MacLeod are each the second highest on record and the count of 3270 Large Sand Plovers at Shark Bay is the fifth highest. In the context of Western Australia, the counts of many species (e.g. Grey Plover, Whimbrel, Eastern Curlew, Grey-tailed Tattler, Red Knot), were the second or third highest on record and were also high in the national context.

It is likely that many of the Curlew Sandpipers and other migratory waders using Lake MacLeod in spring 1987 had recently arrived from farther north and were likely to move southward. Surveys of the lake in summer may however prove that large numbers of waders use it throughout the austral summer.

### Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Don Munro for invaluable assistance with equipment, camping, vehicles and boats and for arranging the aerial surveys.

The RAOU is indebted to each of the following for their part in making or assisting observations during the expedition: Ben Carr,

Allan & Rose Jones, Joy Fleay, Bruce & Anne Buchanan, Bev Nicholson, Roland Hill, Rosemary Duffy, Dot Kingston, Flo Robinson, Gray Pagano, Peel Howden, John Boughey, Grant Pearson, Stuart Halse and Steve Rolls.

We are also grateful to Grant Pearson, Ben Carr and Rosemary Duff for their part in the aerial surveys. Rosemary Duffy kindly arranged accommodation in Carnarvon and Roland Hill made reconnaissance of coastal sites.

The co-operation and advice of managers and staff at Dampier Salt (Lake MacLeod) Operations and Useless Loop Saltworks and Gnoraloo, Edagee, Wooramel and Peron Stations is acknowledged.

A comprehensive report of the expedition is to be published in the RAOU Report series.

**R. Jaensch & R. Vervest, Expedition Coordinators**

## WATERBIRDS COUNTED BY THE RAOU IN ITS EXPEDITION TO THE GASCOYNE REGION

28 SEPTEMBER - 9 OCTOBER 1987

### WADERS (SHOREBIRDS)

	Lake MacLeod	Shark Bay
Pied Oystercatcher	19	28
Grey Plover	34	143
Lesser Golden Plover	7	10
Mongolian Plover	1	41
Large Sand Plover	75	373
Oriental Plover		53
Red-capped Plover	2110	748
Black-fronted Plover	1	
Black-winged Stilt	310	46
Banded Stilt	53098	3623
Red-necked Avocet	2401	129
Ruddy Turnstone	18	93
Eastern Curlew		313
Whimbrel		219
Little Curlew	1	42
Wood Sandpiper		1
Grey-tailed Tattler		300
Common Sandpiper	5	42
Greenshank	92	376
Marsh Sandpiper	66	5
Terek Sandpiper	1	7
Asian Dowitcher	1	
Black-tailed Godwit	25	5
Bar-tailed Godwit	111	1575
Red Knot	2566	17
Great Knot	135	96
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	602	22
Red-necked Stint	8312	852
Long-toed Stint	2	
Curlew Sandpiper	41606	840
Sanderling	1	3
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1	
Unidentified waders		979
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>111601</b>	<b>10981</b>

### OTHER WATERBIRDS

	Lake MacLeod	Shark Bay
Hoary-headed Grebe	50	65
Australian Pelican	376	150
Darter	37	1
Great Cormorant	6	1
Pied Cormorant	504	7000
Little Black Cormorant	134	23
Little Pied Cormorant	28	32
White-faced Heron	37	33
Great Egret	25	70
Little Egret	96	34
Eastern Reef Egret		4

Striated Heron	5	7
Rufous Night Heron	3	
Black Swan	823	
Australian Shelduck	2	220
Grey Teal	313	140
Pink-eared Duck	5	
Osprey		4
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	2	2
Silver Gull	104	260
Pacific Gull	1	13
Whiskered Tern	300	91
White-winged Tern	5	
Gull-billed Tern	1	57
Caspian Tern	213	84
Roseate Tern		17
Fairy Tern	265	50
Crested Tern	4	900
Lesser Crested Tern		102
Little Grassbird	15	
Unidentified egret		120
unidentified crane	1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3355</b>	<b>9480</b>

NOTE: The above figures for Shark Bay were, with the exception of Pied Cormorants, obtained from ground counts at five sectors of the Bay. The total number of waders counted in aerial and ground surveys of Shark Bay (using ground data where overlap occurred), was 25095 birds.

## LAKEDISAPPOINTMENT RAOU EXPEDITION

7 - 19 September 1987

### In Search of the Night Parrot

On 7 September 1987, 18 birds and two members of the Australian Survey Office met at the Oakover River, east of Newman, to mount a search for the elusive Night Parrot. The destination was Lake Disappointment, a large salt lake surrounded by spinifex and patches of samphire. There is some evidence to suggest that Night Parrots use areas of samphire as well as spinifex which is thought to be their main habitat. As there had been good summer rain it was thought that Night

Parrot numbers might be higher than in other years (if Night Parrots occur in the area at all.)

With the help of aerial photographs provided by the Australian Survey Office we chose 3 main sites; a claypan between Well 24 and Well 25 on the Canning Stock Route, a small salt lake at the north-western edge of Lake Disappointment and Terrace Hill, a sandstone ridge on the western edge of the Lake.

The spinifex had seeded heavily round our sites and many other plants were in bloom. There were many birds especially Pied and Black Honeyeaters. Several nests of White-fronted Honeyeaters were found at Terrace Hill and those of Black Honeyeaters were seen.

A number of survey techniques were used. Walking line abreast through the spinifex pulling with a rope to flush birds proved effective in producing Little Button-quail and honeyeater species - but revealed no Night Parrots. Spotlighting at night along tracks, listening for calls, searching Zebra Finch nests for feathers and walking through samphire all produced no trace of a Night Parrot. An unusual call at dusk and some parrot tracks in the dunes raised hopes, but we now suspect that Night Parrots were not in the area.

A sighting highlight was a pair of Alexandra's Parrot which sat placidly on a branch while several members of the party watched them. Other birds included Spinifex Pigeons and Painted Finches at Durba Gorge, Slaty-backed Thornbills at Terrace Hill and a pair of Grey Falcons at the Oakover River.

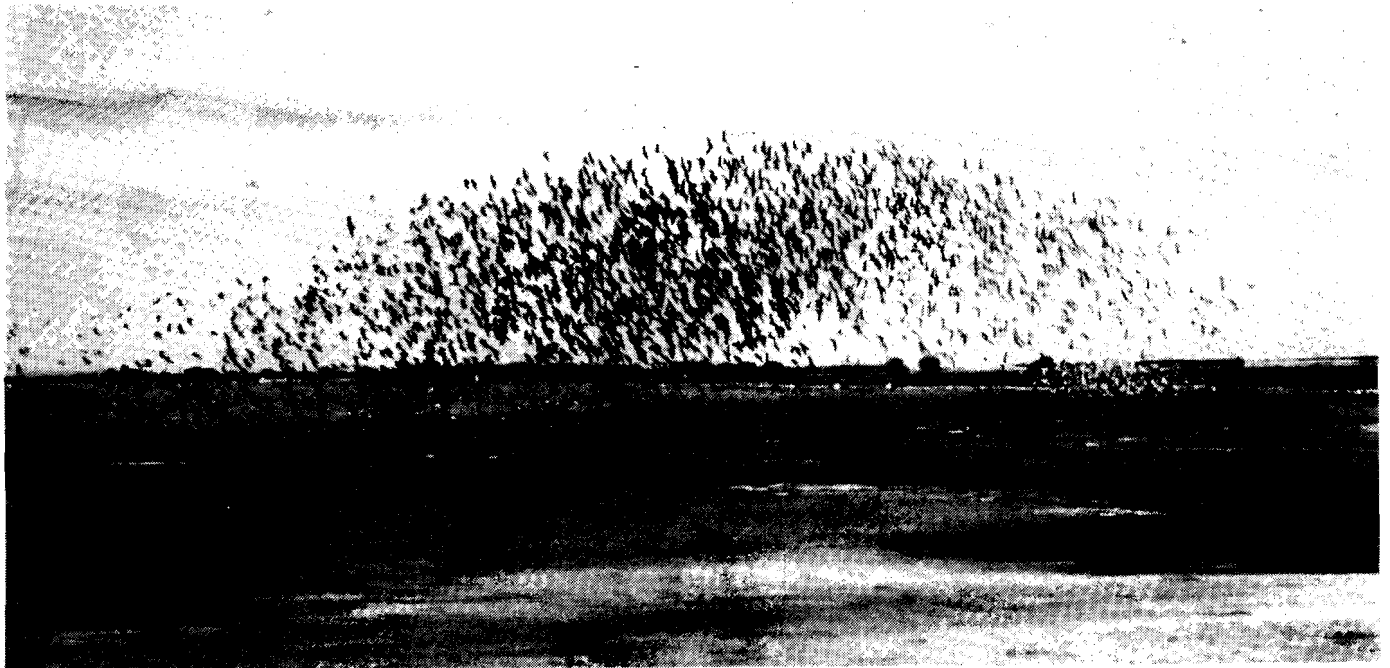
Much useful nesting data was collected for many species and all were able to witness the phenomenon of a 'good' season in the desert.  
**Mandy Bamford**

### JAMBA

The Japan Australia Migratory Birds Agreement covers virtually all of the waders which migrate to Australia from the Northern hemisphere each year. It also covers the Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Caspian Tern and White-winged Tern.

The Agreement obligates the parties, Japan and Australia, to protect migratory species and endangered species. By extension, protection of the species requires protection/conservation of the habitat utilised by migratory and endangered species, though this is not a specific part of the Agreement.

A similar agreement covering migratory species is being considered/negotiated between Australia and China. When concluded, an agreement with China will protect very similar species to those covered by JAMBA.



*A small part of a cloud of waders — Lake Macleod*

*Photo by Roger Jaensch*

# OBSERVATIONS

collated by Rodney Vervest, Roger Jaensch and Richard Stone.

The following records have been partly vetted and should receive further scrutiny before publications 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, Goscoyne, Eucla) 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 period from August to October 1987. Shire names or the nearest known locality 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** - 76, 20/9/87, Clifton Lake (Mandurah) - MHB

**Rockhopper Penguin** - 1, 27/7/87, Kanidal Beach, Eyre - BW, GH

**Black-browed Albatross** - 50+, 21/8/87, Yallingup (Margaret River) - GS

**Southern Giant-Petrel** - 3, July-August 1987, East Beach and Kanidal Beach, Eyre: all beach washed immatures - BW, GH

**Southern Fulmar** - 1, 16/9/87, Twilight Cove, Eyre - BW, GH

**Great-winged Petrel** - 1, 31/10-3/11/87, Alfred Cove (Metro) - SK

**White-chinned Petrel** - 2, 29/7/87, Safety Bay Beach (Rockingham): partly decomposed specimens - AP

**White-faced Heron** - small breeding colony, September-October 1987, Bartram Road, Swamp (Cockburn) - RV, RJ

**Cattle Egret** - 2, 1/11/87, Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo) - GS et al.

**Great Egret** - two pairs, 18/10/87 Zoological Gardens (Metro): building nests - RJ \* 25, 26/10/87, West Corio Swamp (Pinjarra): 15 active nests - RV, RSt \* 46, 27/10/87, McCarley's Swamp (Busselton): 33 active nests - RV, RSt.

**Little Egret** - 2, 18/10/87, Football Lake (Gingin) - ABu, BBu.

**Little Bittern** - 1, late October, Bengier Swamp (Harvey) - DW \* 1, 29/10/87, Kulunilup Lake Nature Reserve (Cranbrook) - RV, RSt.

**Black Bittern** - 2, 16/8/87, southern Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo): reported in paperbarks - MHB.

**Australasian Bittern** - 1, 28/10/87, Kulunilup Lake Nature Reserve (Cranbrook): heard calling in early evening - RV, RSt \* 1, 29/10/87, Owingup Swamp (Denmark): single bird also heard calling from nearby Boat Harbour Lake - RV, RSt.

**Glossy Ibis** - 3, 19/9/87, Namming Lake (Dandaragan) - ABu, BBu \* 1, 30/10/87, Vasse River marshes (Busselton) - RJ.

**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** - 18, 20/9/87, Chittering Lake (Chittering): four active nests - BK \* 18, 17/10/87, Chandala Lake Nature Reserve (Chittering): six active nests - GA.

**Freckled Duck** - 1, 26/12/86, Bayswater Bird Sanctuary (Metro) - FC \* 2, 29/8/87, Oxley Road Swamp (Armadale) - DJ \* 2, 4/9/87, Bartram Road Swamp (Cockburn) - RJ, RV \* 2, Holmes/Balfour Swamp (Gosnells) - RJ \* 5-8, September-October 1987, Gibb Road Swamp (Armadale): two recently used nests found in early November - RJ, RV \* 4, 6/10/87, Yanget Lake (Carnamah) - ABu, BBu.

**Australian Shelduck** - 6000, 17/10/87, Guraga Lake (Dandaragan) - ABu, BBu

**Chestnut Teal** - 18, 6/9/87, Pallinup River (Gnowangerup): ducklings in a river pool - RM

**Blue-billed Duck** - 708, 21/6/87, Yangebup Lake (Cockburn): highest number recorded by RAOU in metro area - DJ \* 3, 18/10/87, North Kogolup Swamp (Cockburn): nest with eggs in Typha - RJ.

**Domestic Goose** - 1, 19/9/87, Southern River area: birds sitting on nest with eggs in pristine paperbark swamp - RJ.

**Square-tailed Kite** - September 1987, two sightings in the Kelmscott area - AC \* September 1987, one in Wungong Gorge - PRH \* 1, 25/9/87, Eyre Bird Observatory - BW, GH \* 2, October 1987, Yanchep N.P. - AB, JR \* 1, 25/10/87, Roleystone area (Armadale) - JS.

**Brown Goshawk** - nesting, September 1987, Bungendore Park (Armadale) - BBa.

**Collared Sparrowhawk** - 1, 18/7/87, Dianella (Metro) - IS, BW1 \* 1, 9/8/87, Rottnest: a single bird seen at Kingston Barracks. Possibly, the first record for the island - SK et al. \* 1, 6/9/87, Fremantle - IS, BW1

**White-bellied Sea-Eagle** - 1, 19/8/87, Thomson's Lake - RS.

**Wedge-tailed Eagle** - 1 nestling, August 1987, Wungong area - PRH

**Buff-banded Rail** - 6, 18/1/87, Swan River, Maylands: young seen in company of adults - BK \* 6, 19/9/87, Alfred Cove (Metro): downy runners and mating birds - PRH \* 2, 18/10/87, Kyabla, 10 km N of Dongara: pair landed on roof - AH \* 1, 30/10/87, Vasse River marshes (Busselton) - RJ

**Baillon's Crake** - 1, 30/10/87, Vasse River marshes (Busselton): in low sparse rush and water weed - RJ

**Spotless Crake** - nest with four eggs, 4/9/87, Bartram Road Swamp (Cockburn) - RJ \* 1, 25/9/87, Eyre Bird Observatory - BW, GH

**Dusky Moorhen** - nest with eggs, 16/9/87, Holmes/Balfour Swamp (Gosnells) - RJ \* nest with five eggs, 23/10/87, Gibb Road Swamp (Armadale) - RJ, RV

**Sooty Oystercatcher** - 2, 16/10/87, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - JD

**Grey Plover** - 5, 31/8/87, Alfred Cove (Metro): in full breeding plumage - PRH et al

**Hooded Plover** - 1, 29/8/87, Graveyard Swamp (Gingin) - ABu, BBu \* 5, 29/10/87, northern tip of Lake Clifton (Mandurah) - JH

**Eastern Curlew** - 1, 25/9/87, Wader Beach, Eyre - BW, GH

**Wood Sandpiper** - 1, 21/9/87, Bengier Swamp (Harvey) - ES \* 7, 6/10/87, Yanget Lake (Carnamah) - ABu, BBu

**Marsh Sandpiper** - 284, 4/9/87, Creery Marshes - Peel Inlet (Mandurah): this is an exceptional count for the south-west; perhaps the birds were on migration - PW

**Terek Sandpiper** - 1, 9/8/87, Alfred Cove (Metro) - PRH

**Long-toed Stint** - 1, 19/10/87, Alfred Cove (Metro) - PRH

**Ruff** - 1, 2/8/87, Alfred Cove (Metro) - GM

**Gull-billed Tern** - 9, 116/9/87, Alfred Cove (Metro) - GM

**Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo** - 93, 8/8/87, Eurady Station (Kalbarri) - PM

**Little Corella** - 900, September 1987, Catby-Regans Ford Road (Gingin): some of the birds were the long-billed form - ABu, BBu

**Regent Parrot** - 14, 8/8/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

**Cockatlel** - 2, 17/10/87, Bodey's Swamp (Gingin) - ABu, BBu

# EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

**Crimson Rosella** - 1, 14/9/87, Gooseberry Hill (Kalamunda): probable aviary escapee seen in company with Port Lincoln Parrots - BWi

**Pallid Cuckoo** - 1, 17/10/87, Walyunga N.P.: being fed by Little Wattlebird - IS (Cuckoos that migrate to Australia are well known for their parasitic breeding behaviour. At least 80 species have been recorded as hosts for the Pallid Cuckoo; see the RAOU Atlas - OO)

**Fork-tailed Swift** - 1, 15/10/87, Woodvale Research Centre (Wanneroo) - RV, BC

**Red-backed Kingfisher** - 1, 5/10/87, Burnabbie, Eyre - BW, GH

**Rufous Treecreeper** - 1, 20/9/87, Paull's Valley (Kalamunda) - SK

**Red-eared Firetail** - 2, 1/10/86, McNess Drive, Roleystone (Armadale) - JS

**Common Mynah** - 1, 2/9/87, Brentwood Shopping Centre (Metro): possibly an aviary escapee; it was perched on powerlines - EG

**Australian Magpie-lark** - 70+, 24/7/87, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale): roosting in pine trees - DJ

## UPNORTH

**Black Blittern** - 1, 29/8/87, Bell Gorge - DK et al.

**Square-tailed Kite** - 1, 13/9/87, Munkayarra, 20 km S of Derby - DK

**Brolga** - 6, 5/9/87, Waroora Station (Carnarvon) - PM (Two birds were also seen E of Minilya Roadhouse on 27/9/87 during an aerial survey for the RAOU's Remote Wetland Expedition to Lake MacLeod. These localities are well south of the usual range for this species - OO)

**Oriental Plover** - 5, 14/9/87, 66 km W of Telfer: flushed from gravel road, one road kill on following day - JBr

**Flock Bronzewing** - 2000+, 13/9/87, Carnarvon - GS

**Thick-billed Grasswren** - several, 8/10/87, Monkey Mia Caravan Park: running between tents - RAOU Expedition

**Orange Chat** - 10, 28/5/87, Malcolm Dam Nature Reserve, 10 km E of Leonora - MG

**Yellow Chat** - 10, 13/9/87, Incata (Camballin area) - DK

## KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

AB - Alan Burbidge	GS - Geoff Shannon
ABu - Anne Buchanan	IS - Ian Standring
AC - Annette Curry	JBr - John Brooke
AH - Arpita Hayes	JD - Jack Donohoe
AP - Adrian Pinder	JH - John Hansen
BBu - Bruce Buchanan	JR - Julie Raines
BBa - Bryan Barrett	JS - John Start
BC - Ben Carr	MHB - Mary Bremner
BK - Brad Kneebone	MG - Mal Graham
BW - Brice Wells	OO - Observation Officer
BWi - Brian Wilson	PM - Peter Mack
BWl - Bev Wilcox	PRH - Peel Howden
DJ - David James	PW - Peter Wilmot
DK - Dot Kingston	RJ - Roger Jaensch
EG - Eric Green	RM - Ruth Moir
ES - Eric Sedgewick	RS - Robert Smith
FC - Fred Coles	RSt - Richard Stone
GA - George Agar	RV - Rodney Vervest
GH - Gail Hooper	RvD - Ron van Delft
GM - George Miller	SK - Steve Keeling

We did not have a whale to grace our "Wintering with Whales" course this year. For the first time in ten years whales failed to appear but we are sure it was a temporary aberration. Book early for next year's course.

There is great progress on the Pygmy Possum front. The ten boxes mentioned in September (3 up - 7 ready) are now thirty four. These are scattered on or at the base of the dunes. At the time of writing twenty three have been occupied by between forty or fifty adult possums of both sexes, principally females. This figure does not include young. If young are included, the total would be about one hundred.

The female in Box One has had, and so far raised fifteen young in three litters since early June. They are beautiful little creatures, and have captured many hearts since the possum project began. This definitely includes both wardens. We try not to disturb the possums more than once a week at the time we weigh, measure and marvel.

Eyre continues to provide unexpected sightings. While having lunch at Twilight Cove recently, a Spotless Crake flew in from the direction of the sea. Landing not more than twenty metres from the group, the Spotless Crake walked over the sandhills and into the shelter of a thick shrub. A little patient waiting saw it emerge later (rather more carefully) to allow confirmation of the identification. This was the third Crake (and one Rail) that have been seen at Eyre, in spite of the improbable location.

Strong northerlies bring both flies and unusual birds. Late in September northerlies blew a mixed flock of about one hundred Masked and White-browed Woodswallows over the Observatory. Most flew high heading almost due east, calling continuously but a small group landed close to the Observatory, to be clearly seen by all. We have also had a Red-backed Kingfisher at the Linesmen's camp beyond Burnabbie for the past week or so. Redthroats and Crimson Chats have been seen there occasionally.

Nesting has been fairly light this year, due possibly to the dry season, but we have had some successes. At present we are watching a Brown Goshawk and Willie Wagtails incubating eggs. We have also banded seventeen nestlings from six nests. Five of these being Welcome Swallow nests in the roof of the Observatory, the other a Jacky Winter nest which contained two young.

One of our more unusual and successful courses this year was "Esperanto, Birds and Nature" which was thoroughly enjoyed by everybody involved. Wally Klau's Banding Course was low in numbers (due to late scratchings), but very big on action and involvement. We caught and banded a Brown Goshawk for the first time at Eyre and a Red Knot - caught at night with a spotlight and dab net. Four Grey Currawongs were also added to the list. One was caught in a cage trap, the other three in a Cam trap.

Eyre is a great place to be. Visit us in the near future and discover for yourself.

**The Wardens of Eyre**

## EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY 1988 COURSES

### Dune Stabilisation Work Party.

Leaders Rod Smith & Marion Davies

8 - 21 January 1988

Special fee: \$20 per day. Minimum stay: 4 days

Helped by experienced leaders, enjoy a working holiday while you get fit healthy and tanned. All you need to do is enjoy half a day planting seeds, breathing fresh sea air and appreciating the panorama from Irene's Peak. A bargain difficult to resist.

Due to the great success of work parties in previous years this may be your last chance to join in the fun. You can be part of this important project for a minimum of 4 days at any time during the period 8 - 21 January 1988.

## Going Batty on the Nullabor.

Leader: Doug Watkins

24-30 January 1988

Fees: \$190 (\$170 if paid by 24 December 1987)

Come and meet some Chocolate Bats: Hundreds of these lovely mammals raise their young in the caves of the Nullabor. During the week you will be shown how to use mist nets and harp traps, handle and band bats, detect their calls and have a good time. We'll also set drift lines to monitor the local populations of Pygmy Possums, Dunnarts and Hopping Mice.

## Easter Excursions.

Leaders: The Wardens 1-4 April 1988

Fees: \$110 (\$90 if paid by 1 March 1988)

If you have never been to Eyre do something completely different for Easter 1988. For those who have been this is an ideal opportunity for a quick revisit. This special course, led by the wardens, offers interesting excursions and activities and is ideal for those who want to experience in a short time all that Eyre has to offer. Experience the beauty and peace of Eyre and you're sure to return. Begins mid-day Good Friday. Finished mid-day Easter Monday.

# NOTICES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The photograph of Great Knot on Page 1 of the September issue of WA Bird Notes (No 43) was taken and kindly supplied by Mr. P. Howden. Production difficulties prevented acknowledgement in September. Ed.

## MEMBERSHIP

Thank you those who have sent their 1988 subscriptions in early either to Melbourne or to Canning Bridge. If you have not yet sent in a subscription, please remember that all subscriptions should be sent to Canning Bridge. EMU, WABN and Research Fund donations may be sent all together. We will send money on to Melbourne each month.

## CHANGE OF RULES: WA GROUP

At the conclusion of the meeting of 29 September a change of rules was passed unanimously. This followed notice of the change being given at the August meeting. Rule 7 now reads -

"The Group shall meet at least once per year to hold the Annual General Meeting in Perth in January or February. Ten members shall constitute a quorum."

The change is the addition of the words "or February" which will enable the AGM to be held in other than January - when many members are away.

# CHAIRMAN'S JOTTINGS

I am often asked 'Why can I not join just the WA Group?' It seems a very reasonable question. However, the WA Group receives considerable benefit by being part of a recognised national organisation.

Recently we have been receiving 15% of your Melbourne subscription which goes to subsidise WA Bird Notes and hopefully Bird Report. (If more people subscribed to WA Bird Notes it could easily become self sufficient).

There is much more. Research funding from CALM and other bodies is only given to bodies with a proven research record and scientific credibility. The RAOU is such a body and so has been able to attract research funds. This enables Roger Jaensch to be employed and part of the research grants received pays for the office, with the WA Group making a lesser contribution. As a separate WA Group we could not afford such a well equipped office.

Without the help and backing of the RAOU it is unlikely that the Eyre Bird Observatory and the soon to be opened one at Broome would

have got off the ground. Our involvement with the Wellard and Capel projects arose because of the standing of the RAOU.

Furthermore, birding anywhere is more than a local issue. WA has sites of international importance such as Eighty Mile Beach and Lake MacLeod and such places need to be coordinated by a national body within a national context.

The RAOU newsletter keeps us informed about some of the bird news from other parts of Australia. This is not only about some of the rarer sightings but also about research on endangered species. The Red Goshawk Project that will involve several States is an example of work that can only be carried out and funded by a national body.

However, a strong local group is important. It is not only vital to support national projects but also it initiates local ones, such as the National Parks Project. The Committee would welcome ideas for further projects and volunteers to organise them or to participate in those suggested by others.

I wish to thank all the Committee and sub-committee workers for the hard work they have put in this year, especially the work done by those organising the trading table, the profits from which have enabled the purchase of a computer.

The next General Meeting will be the AGM on Monday 8 February, 1988. As always all positions will be declared vacant and up for election. Come and have your say in the running of your organisation.

G. Shannon

# NATIONAL PARKS SURVEY

## FIRST REPORT

Thank you for the many cards which have already been sent in. A wide variety of Parks are covered.

We have not commenced entering your data into the National Parks computer lists but hopefully by the time this edition is in your hands all data should be entered.

The National Parks Data bank is designed to store all reports of bird sighting in the month in which they are observed. The data can easily be expanded to cover all of WA in 1 degree grid block references. Such information will be of value should research be carried out into migration patterns or intra-state movements.

Whenever you send in records to the office, PLEASE include either the degree reference points or sufficient information for us to locate the position correctly.

Summer is almost here and many will travel south for holidays or birdwatching trips. Keep an eye on your National Parks Map. You will be surprised how many Parks you actually drive through on main roads along the South Coast.

Try some new ones like Stokes Inlet and D'Entrecasteaux which have all types of birds.

C. Napier

# MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

## GOULDIAN FINCH PROJECT REPORT

A recent discovery by WWF Australia's project officers Dr Sonia Tidemann and Dr John Woinarski, may help pinpoint the reason for the decline in wild populations of the beautiful Gouldian Finch.

According to Sonia and John, the reduction of the Gouldian Finch to seriously low numbers in the wild may be due to the escape of aviary birds.

A tiny mite has been found in four out of every five birds trapped by Sonia and John since their study began last year. The mite which has previously only been found in aviary birds infests the trachea, bronchi and air sacs of the lungs. By causing mucus to build up in the bird's respiratory pathways, the mites make breathing difficult and may lead to death.

The appearance in the wild of the mite is a puzzle. It may have been caused by the escape of aviary birds into the wild or it may have been

introduced into the wild by the release of caged birds.

Because finches are gregarious birds which spend much of their time in large flocks, transmission of the mite between birds could occur easily during preening sessions. Once the mite is established in a population it will be passed from parents to nestlings during feeding.

Whilst the research team has found the mite in wild Gouldian Finches, it has not been found in any other finches in the Top End.

Research has been hampered because all known populations of finches have dispersed due to the wet season.

No-one knows where the finches have disappeared to.

Once populations have been rediscovered, the project will focus on how widespread the mites are and what the next step in dealing with the problem will be.

From World Wildlife Fund Newsletter No. 31. April-June 1987.

### Pelican Point - July 86 - June 87

Forty six visits to Pelican Point have been made during the 12 months July 1986-June 1987, mainly on a weeknight at 5.30pm but also on some weekends.

The total number of species seen was 56 compared with 48 during the previous 12 months (July '85-June '86) The species have either been seen within the reserve, on the river immediately adjacent or from the car park area immediately outside the entrance gate by the viewing mound.

The small number of waders were a feature of the summer and whether this is an isolated occurrence or part of a continuing trend remains to be seen. However, the presence of Silver Gulls in increasing numbers may have acted as a deterrent to waders. Two species were seen for the first time - a single Pied Oystercatcher (present on one occasion) and Striated Pardalotes (six occasions in the trees in the parking area).

During the past four years 64 species have been seen at the Pelican Point reserve, a good reason for retaining reserve status should management ever be transferred to the City of Subiaco.

M. Bailey

### PELICAN POINT JULY 86 TO JUNE 87

#### Bird species seen and number of sightings in 46 visits

46	Silver Gull	
38	Red-capped Plover	
38	Caspian Tern	
38	Crested Tern	Group A
38	Welcome Swallow	Seen >75% of visits
38	Singing Honeyeater	
35	Pacific Black Duck	
35	Laughing Turtle-Dove	
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32	Black-winged Stilt	
29	Little Pied Cormorant	Group B
28	Australian Pelican	Seen >50%-75% of visits
25	Grey Plover	
23	Little Black Cormorant	
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22	Brown Honeyeater	
21	Common Sandpiper	
21	Red-necked Stint	
21	Tree Martin	
20	Red Wattlebird	Group C
19	Great Cormorant	Seen 25%-49% of visits
15	Grey Teal	
15	Greenshank	
14	Red-necked Avocet	
12	Variiegated Fairy-wren	
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11	Rainbow Bee-eater	
10	Spotted Turtle-Dove	

9	Australian Shelduck	
8	Curlew Sandpiper	
8	Fairy Tern	
7	Darter	
6	Striated Pardalote	
5	Bar-tailed Godwit	
5	Galah	
5	Willie Wagtail	
4	Black-shouldered Kite	
4	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	
3	Rufous Night Heron	
3	Great Knot	
3	Port Lincoln Ringneck	
2	Pied Cormorant	Group D
2	Terek Sandpiper	Seen <25% of visits
2	Richard's Pipit	
1	White-faced Heron	
1	Great Egret	
1	Sacred Ibis	
1	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	
1	Black Swan	
1	Mallard	
1	Australian Kestrel	
1	Pied Oystercatcher	
1	Red Knot	
1	Sanderling	
1	White-tailed Black Cockatoo	
1	Sacred Kingfisher	
1	Australian Magpie-lark	
1	Grey Butcherbird	
1	Australian Raven	

#### Total of 56 species seen during 46 visits

Month:	1986					1987						
	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
No. of Visits	2	3	6	8	6	6	3	4	5	2	0	1

M. Bailey

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT - PROTEIN SUPPLEMENTS

#### A Bird Study

Recent surveys involving 'protein' supplements and 'protein-calorie' supplements given to children in New Guinea and India have demonstrated increases in both weight and height as well as increased periosteal diameters.

A study of the Singing Honeyeaters resident on Rottnest Island shows that these birds have 21% lean body mass greater than the same species on the mainland. The Rottnest birds also take a one size larger leg band.

Pollen studies show that 7500 years ago Rottnest was covered by sclerophyll forest similar to that in areas of the mainland today. This forest contained the nectar-rich flowering plants of banksia, hakea and grevillea species. Since European occupation of Rottnest in the mid 1800s, the native forest of ti-tree, wattle and pines has been reduced from 65% to 5% leaving mainly scrubby heathland poor in flowering plants. As a result, on Rottnest Island today insects abound, but nectar-rich flowering plants are scarce and seasonal.

It is possible that the Rottnest Island Singing Honeyeater, largely isolated from the mainland for some 6500 years, are an ornithological model for human nutritional studies. The gradually increased protein diet of Rottnest Singing Honeyeaters may account for their greater body mass.

M. Bremner with D. Saunders (CSIRO)

### KNIGHT TAKES QUEEN

On May 12 this year I was observing a pair of Brush Bronzewing on the west side of the Magenta Nature Reserve when a Peregrine

