

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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WHITE-THROATED NEEDLETAILS

On the 29th March 1989, at about 7.30 am, walking on the nature trail south at Lake Joondalup, and about 175 metres past the jetty, I saw a bird perching on the uppermost branch of a paperbark. It was a species I had never seen before.

There had been some tree clipping in the area and I used this as cover to get closer to the bird. When within 30 metres I first thought that the bird might be a woodswallow or a Fork-tailed Swift. At this stage I was only using my binoculars (12 x 50).

I decided to set up my telescope to give me a closer look. After setting up my telescope I started taking notes on the bird.

It was about 20-22.5 cms (8 to 9 inches) in length, with a dark brown rump. It was somewhat paler towards the head, with a slightly green sheen to the dark areas. The bird's underparts were mainly white (throat, vent, flanks): however, there did appear to be a slightly grey tinge to the throat area.

The wings were dark glossy green and extended about 2 to 3 inches past the tail and crossed each other. The tail was short, dark brown-green above and white below. It had small spines extending from the tail feathers about 1/4 inch long. The eye, legs and beak appeared all black in colour, the beak slightly down curved.

The bird was perched unmoving on a branch. When I broke a twig, the bird shuffled up and down the branch a few times before resuming its earlier stance. Shortly after this the bird tilted its body forward over the branch. It did this three times then stopped, then three times again. This went on for about 5 to 10 minutes before the bird settled.

It was very quiet while I was sitting there when the cry of another bird made my subject take flight. All I saw as it flew past was swept back wings and a distinctly square tail. The wing beats were quick, and very deep, with the tips appearing to touch.

I then lost sight of it and did not locate it on the way back to my car. I did see a raptor soaring high up. It might be that the bird which called may have seen the raptor and so alerted others including my subject. I concluded it was a White-throated Needletail.

M. Whackett

On 29th March at about 8.30 am, with a warm strong easterly blowing, Graham Little and I were walking along the nature trail on the West side of North Lake Joondalup, when we stopped to look at some small birds in the trees lining the pathway. I then noticed some other birds much higher above the trees and we moved out into the open to have a better view.

In a clear blue sky we could immediately identify them as swifts of some sort and we counted about 10-12 birds.

They were travelling from West to East; we could not estimate their height above us; however they appeared very high.

As we watched this small group, we noted their flight was slow, mostly gliding then swooping or diving occasionally, but still travelling in the same direction. They were large birds compared to say a Welcome Swallow (more than double the size) with long pointed wings. As we watched we compared the length of their tails to the wing length and their tails appeared shortish and squared off. Their overall colour was a greyish-black - what I'd call faded black. White marks were visible at their throats and also visible under their tails, although at such a height these were sometimes difficult to detect.

After 10-15 minutes, we estimated there were approximately 50 birds overhead. They disappeared eastwards at this time. We both concluded these birds were White-throated Needletail. Our reference guide at the time was Peter Slater's (1970) "*A Field Guide to Australian Birds - Non-passerines*".

C. Wilder

The report of a White-throated Needletail in the South-West of Western Australia is unusual. Serventy and Whittell (1976) report a flock at Bickley in 1944 and a lone bird south of Albany in 1956. Storr (1987) reports a sighting near Rawlinnain 1969 and in 1985 near Red Rocks Point in the Eucla and Storr, Johnstone and Griffin (1986) report a group over Pelsaert Island in 1984. There were no W.A. reports in *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al 1984) which covered the period 1977 to 1982.

Whackett's observation is particularly interesting in that the White-throated Needletail was roosting in a tree. Although Simpson (1979) states "At night they roost in trees in forested hill country" (p.314), Blakers et al (1984) state "the species is thought to remain in the air during its time in Australia but there are some instances of birds roosting" (p.321).

The White-throated Needletail is migratory and leaves Australia in March/April, having arrived in October (Simpson 1979, Blakers et al 1984). It is likely therefore that the bird seen was departing from Australia. Strong easterly winds were blowing about the day of sighting so that it may have travelled with the wind to Western Australia or been part of a western migratory group which occasionally occurs (Serventy and Whittell 1976).

The observations of Wilder and Little are an interesting possible confirmation of a western migratory flock. However confusion with the more common Fork-tailed Swift is not unusual (Blakers et al 1984, comment on this) and their report must be regarded as unconfirmed, though highly suggestive in the circumstances of a possible sighting on the same day and in the same area at a similar time to Whackett.

(Ed)

References:

- Blakers M, Davies S J J F, Reilly P N (1984), *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, RAOU: Melbourne University Press
 Serventy D L and Whittell H M (1976), *Birds of Western Australia*: UWA Press, Perth
 Simpson K (1979) in *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*, Readers Digest Services Pty Ltd: Sydney
 Storr G M (1987) *Birds of the Eucla Division of Western Australia*: WA Museum, Perth
 Storr G M, Johnstone R E, Griffin P (1986), *Birds of the Houtman Abrolhos, Western Australia*, WA Museum, Perth

OBSERVATIONS

Please send details of sightings to 'Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the RAOU. Unusual sightings should be accompanied by field notes. Preliminary checking of the following observations has been undertaken but further scrutiny should be given prior to inclusion in any official or technical report. This list of observations mainly covers the period from February 1989 to April 1989.

Compiled by Roger Jaensch.

DOWN SOUTH

- Great Crested Grebe** - 1, 5/3/89, Walyungup Lake - JHu * 3, 16/3/89, Fitzes Swamp (nr Kojonup) - WZ, RG: with young * 1, 18/3/89, Richmond Lake - DJ * 108+, including immatures, 19/3/89, Jerdacuttup (West) Lake - RJ: prolific local breeding in 1988-9.
Hoary-headed Grebe - 1152, 18/2/89, Forrestdale Lake - DJ * nest with eggs, in paperbark thicket, 13/3/89, Toocalup Swamp (Bremer dist.) - RJ.
Yellow-nosed Albatross - 5000+, 3-4/8/88, off The Gap (Albany) - MWe: mostly passing to the west.
Little Shearwater - 20, 3-4/8/88, off The Gap (Albany) - MWe.

Darter - nests with young in mid-March 1989 at Gnorrbup Swamp (Bremer dist.) (4 nests), Minvalara Swamp (Bremer dist.) (1), Dunns East Swamp (Hopetoun) (5), and Murray River from Ravenswood Bridge to Pinjarra (7) - RJ, JS.

Great Cormorant - 8, at 5 nests with young, 19/3/89, Dunns East Swamp (Hopetoun) - RJ: there are few known breeding localities for this species in WA and none previously in Eucla Division. Nests were in paperbarks.

Pacific Heron - nest with young, 19/11/88, Bidley Lake - MG * 2, 23/2/89, pond near Morley Drive roundabout (Dianella) - RN.

White-faced Heron - 300+, 20/1/89, Bodey's Swamp (Wannamal dist.) - BBU * 1, 18/3/89, Rottnest Golf Course - SW, LJ.

Cattle Egret - 2, 10/3/89, Joondalup Lake South - GL.

Great Egret - 5, 15/3/89, Hilliup Lake - RJ: near large heronry, where they may have bred in 1988-9 * 137, 19/3/89, Chittering Lake - BKn.

Little Egret - 1, 19/2/89, Kogolup Lake - DJ * 2, 29/3/89, Joondalup Lake North - CW, GL.

Rufous Night Heron - 35+, many with near-fledged young, 15/3/89, Hilliup Lake - RJ.

Australasian Bittern - 1, 25/11/88, Ten Mile Swamp (Manypeaks dist.) - SK * 1, 28/1-12/3/89, Mettler Lake - PL * 1, 20/3/89, Grasmere Lake - MN.

Glossy Ibis - 3, 19/11/88, White Lake (Gingin dist.) - PB * 1, 7/1/89, Watts Road Lake (Wilson) - JHu * 1, 12/2/89, Hurstview Lake (Cataby dist.) - BBU.

Straw-necked Ibis - 200, breeding, 29/11/88, Caro Swamp (Cataby dist.) - SH * some breeding in spring 1988 at Ngamburnup Lake (Busselton dist.) - via JL.

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 15, plus nest with largish young, 15/3/89, Hilliup Lake - RJ * 1, 17/3/89, Coolinup Swamp (E of Esperance) - RJ * 26, 19/3/89, Jerdacuttup (West) Lake - RJ * 115, 19/3/89, Chittering Lake - BKn.

Black Swan - 83, 7/2/89, Alfred Cove - Anon.: flew in from down-river.

Freckled Duck - 43, 18/3/89, Barrett-Lennard Lake (Gingin dist.) - BBU: once again, the top site for this species in March.

Hardhead - late breeding (dependent young) at Kogolup Lake on 4/2/89 and Forrestdale Lake on 16/4/89 - DJ.

Black Kite - 1, 23-24/2/89, Avon Valley near Toodyay and at Northam - JM: rare in the south-west.

Square-tailed Kite - 1, 1/3/89, Roleystone - JS.

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, immature, 14/3/89, Point Dundas (Swan R) - JHu * 1, 31/3/89, Claremont Lake - VR.

Little Eagle - 1, 13/3/89, Darglish Road (Wembley) - MO * 2, one a dark-phase bird, 9/4/89, Herdsman Lake - RJ: over dry rushland. The dark-phase Little Eagle may be confused with other raptors, so take care! It occurs regularly in the area from Perth to Mandurah.

Peregrine Falcon - 1, 8/3/89, Joondalup Lake - GL * 1, 10/3/89, Indoon Lake - BBU.

Australian Hobby - 1, 13/3/89, Rottnest Island - (?) MWh.

Spotless Crane - highest count of 51, 19/3/89, Forrestdale Lake - DJ.

Dusky Moorhen - 76, 14/3/89, Murray River from Delta to Pinjarra - JS.

Australian Bustard - 2, 6/4/89, edge of Norseman townsite - MH: in heavily-timbered country.

Pied Oystercatcher - 15, 13/2/89, Alfred Cove - PH.

- Large Sand Plover** - 1, 27/2/89, Coo loongup Lake - JHu.
- Black-fronted Plover** - 50, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R), 25/3/89 - JHu.
- Hooded Plover** - 50, including runners, 20/11/88, Benje Benjenup Lake (Esperance dist.) - JE * 2 adults and 2 juveniles, 20/11/88, Two Mile Lake (Stirling Ranges NP) - AR * 2 adults and 1 juvenile, 12/1/89, Cosy Corner Beach (Augusta dist.) - MWe * 75, plus nest with eggs, and runners, 7/2/89, Dunn Rock Nature Reserve ski lake - MG * 3, 26/2/89, Baghdad Lake (Rottnest) - PH.
- Red-necked Avocet** - 3000, 28/2/89, McLarty Lake - JHu * 1000, 25/3/89, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R) - JHu.
- Ruddy Turnstone** - 1, 27/2/89, Coo loongup Lake - JHu * 2, 5/3/89, Walyungup Lake - JHu.
- Eastern Curlew** - 1, 12/2/89, Rottnest Island (west end) - MB * 1, 14/3/89, near Lower King Bridge (Albany dist.) - LB.
- Wood Sandpiper** - 6, 20/1/88, Burnside Lake (Beverley dist.) - PC * 25, 30/1/89, Ludlow (?McCarley's) Swamp - MWe * 30, 12/3/89, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R) - JHu * 60+, 6/2/89, McLarty Lake - RJ.
- Grey-tailed Tattler** - 10, 12/2/89, Rottnest Island - MB * 22, 14/3/89, Lower Kalgan River bridge (Albany dist.) - LB: at high tide.
- Marsh Sandpiper** - 1, 20/11/88, Burnside Lake (Beverley dist.) - PC * 1, 11/3/89, Hurstview Lake (Cataby dist.) - BBu * 5, 15/3/89, Fuss Road Yate Swamp (Munglinup dist.) - RJ.
- Gallinago snipe** - 1, 26/2/89, Herdsman Lake - RN * 2 at same locality on 5/4/89 - RJ * 1 remaining on 9/4/89 - RN, RJ, PdR. Most likely Pin-tailed Snipe due to feet trailing beyond tail, calls and flight.
- Black-tailed Godwit** - 1, 20/2/89 & 8/5/89, Claremont Lake - JHu * highest count of 65, 30/3/89, McLarty Lake - RJ, JHu: possibly the highest number counted at one wetland in south-western Australia.
- Pectoral Sandpiper** - 6+, 6/2/89, McLarty Lake - RJ * 3, 12/3/89, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R) - JHu.
- Long-toed Stint** - 3, 10/2/89, Forrest-Liddelow Swamp (Banjup) - JHu * 24+, 6/2/89, McLarty Lake - RJ * 10, 27/2/89, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R) - JHu * 1, 15/4/89, Kogolup Lake - DJ, BF.
- Curlew Sandpiper** - 2500, 20/1/89, Vasse Estuary - RJ * 2600, 27/2/89, Coo loongup Lake - JHu * 3000, 30/3/89, McLarty Lake - RJ. Numbers of this species in the south of WA have been higher than average in 1988-9.
- Sanderling** - 15, 21/1/89, Woodman Point - BBa et al.
- Broad-billed Sandpiper** - 1, 11/3/89, Hurstview Lake (Cataby dist.) - BBu. No description supplied, but has been seen previously at nearby Guraga Lake.
- Ruff** - 1, 30/1/89, Alfred Cove - PH * 2, 12/3/89, Amarillo Pool (Serpentine R) - JHu * 5, 12/3/89, McLarty Lake - JHu et al.: 5 were seen there in a previous year. The south-west continues to support equal or higher numbers of Ruffs than anywhere else in Australia.
- Arctic Jaeger** - 4, with Pomarine Jaeger - 1, 9/1/89, off Fitzgerald River NP - MWe.
- Whiskered Tern** - 1, 12/2/89, Mongers Lake (Perth) - MO: photograph supplied.
- White-winged Tern** - 1, 5/4/89, Herdsman Lake - RJ: seen at closer range, perched.
- Caspian Tern** - 30, including young being fed, 25/3/89, Fitzgerald Inlet - MB.
- Common Tern** - unconfirmed reports of 1-2 at Alfred Cove, 9/2-7/3/89 (PH, MWh) and Dundas Point, 7/2/89 (KH).
- Fairy Tern** - 13, 12/3/89, Rushy Point (Albany Harbour) - DC.
- Crested Pigeon** - 1, 15/3/89, near Ocean Beach Caravan Park (Denmark) - LB.
- Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo** - 200+, 15/3/89, 6km west of Merredin - RS * 18, 10/5/89, Serpentine Pipehead Dam - PH: in heavy jarrah, in two groups * 50+, 10/5/89, 7km north of Jarrahdale - PH: partly cleared jarrah.
- White-tailed Black-Cockatoo** - 4, 24/1-15/2/89, Rottnest Island - EM, MB: feeding in Norfolk Island pines. January record was after strong easterlies.
- Rainbow Lorikeet** - in fig trees, 6/2/89, Palmyra 'Valley' - LL * up to 15, summer 88-9, Applecross - KH: "more prevalent than ever before".
- Regent Parrot** - 2, 13/3/89, roadside scrub west of Bremer Bay - RJ * 1, 3/4/89, Devlin Pool (Greenough R) - PM.
- Western Rosella** - male, 22/3/89, Attadale garden - PH.
- Pallid Cuckoo** - 1, 17/4/89, Drummond Cove (nr Geraldton) - PM: not calling.
- Fork-tailed Swift** - 19, 23/1/89, Point Moore lighthouse (Geraldton) - PM * ca. 120, 31/3/89, Denmark - LB: flying to ENE, ahead of approaching low * 1, 23/4/89, Thomsons Lake - JS: blue sky before frontal rain.
- White-backed Swallow** - 15-20, 28/1/89, Holmes Road near Thomsons Lake - BBa.
- Crested Shrike-tit** - 2, 9/3/89, Dryandra - JS * near William Bay NP, 24-26/3/89 - JS: in 20m karri.
- Southern Emu-wren** - 4, 19/2/89, Smith's Beach near Yallingup - JHi.
- Calamanthus** - feeding flying young, 26/3/89, at Telegraph Track just east of Fitzgerald Inlet - MB.
- Slaty-backed Thornbill** - 4, 19/4/89, Mt Magnet - JS.
- Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** - active nest, 22/10/89, near Wanderingon York-Williams road - MO.

UP NORTH

- Australian Pelican** - 250, 10/4/89, water-covered mudflats 16km south of Wyndham - KO.
- Plumed Whistling-Duck** - one with 22 small young, 9/2/89, Three Mile Creek (Wyndham) - KO.
- Mallard** - 4, 14/9/88, Broome Wildlife Park ponds - BW: migrants??
- Garganey** - 2, 2-23/12/88, Broome Wildlife Park ponds - BW: this is the fifth (known) Kimberley locality for this migrant.
- Buff-banded Rail** - 1, 3/3/89, Derby Sewage Ponds swamp - BKa.
- Baillon's Crake** - 4, 26/3/89, Taylors Lagoon (Broome dist.) - BKa.
- Australian Crake** - 28, 3/3/89, Derby Sewage Ponds swamp - BKa.
- White-browed Crake** - juvenile, 19/2/89, Lake Eda - BKa, PK: description supplied. No previous records from West Kimberley.
- Red-necked Avocet** - 66, 6/3/89, water-covered mudflats 16km south of Wyndham - KO.
- Wood Sandpiper** - 7, 20/11/89, Hamelin Pool (swamp?) - MWe.
- Gallinago snipe** - 1, 17/1/89, Roebuck Plains - BW * 1, 16/3/89, Broome Sewage Ponds - BKa.
- Pectoral Sandpiper** - 1, 4/3/89, Derby Sewage Ponds - BKa.
- Collared Kingfisher** - 1, 9/1/89, Crab Creek (Broome dist.) - BW, DK.

Yellow Wagtail - summer 1988-9: up to 18 on oval in Broome (6/12/88) and up to 12 on Roebuck Plains (25/12/88) - BW.

Kimberley Flycatcher - 1, 20/11/88, Crab Creek (Broome dist.) - BW.

Little Shrike-thrush - 1, 25/12/88, edge of Roebuck Plains - BW.

Black Honeyeater - 3, 10/3/89, near Broome Bird Observatory - BW.

Crimson Chat - 2, 9/11/88, Broome Sewage Ponds - BW.

KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

AR - Allan Rose	MB - Mary Bremner
BBa - Bryan Barrett	MG - Mal Graham
BBu - Bruce & Anne Buchanan	MH - Max Howard
BF - Bryony Fremlin	MN - Margaret Nash
BKa - Brad Kane	MO - Margaret Owen
BKn - Brad Kneebone	MWh - Mark Whackett
BW - Brice Wells & Gail Hooper	MWe - Mark Welfare
CW - Chris Wilder	PB - Phyllis Bentley
DC - Dan Carter	PC - Peter Congreve
DJ - David James	PdR - Perry de Rebeira
DK - Dot Kingston	PH - Peel Howden
EM - Eric McCrum	PK - Peter Kelly
GL - Graham Little	PL - Pattie Leighton
JE - Jack Ewert	PM - Peter Mack
JHu - Jack Hunt	RG - Ray Garstone
JHi - Jan Higham	RJ - Roger Jaensch
JL - Jim Lane	RN - Richard Nowotny
JM - Jim Masters	RS - Ray Schulz
JS - John & Helen Start	SH - Stuart Halse
KH - Katherine Highman	SK - Sue Keogh
KO - 'Kimberley Observer'	SW - Stephanie Winnett
LB - Lola Broadhurst	VR - Vicki Revington
LJ - Lani Johnston	WZ - Wayne Zadow
LL - Les Larson	

ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNTS

Results from the November 1988 and March 1989 Counts are to hand, though some final adjustments may occur before they are published later this year. Though some of the study's 176 survey blocks (Kalbarri to Cape Arid) were not covered in November, coverage was near perfect in March. A fixed set of about 1100 wetlands, including all major types, was surveyed in each Count. Major coastal wetlands were covered by CALM in an aerial survey.

As predicted, numbers were generally lower in November, when considerable breeding activity was recorded (mainly Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Eurasian Coot), than in March, when birds were concentrated at remaining waters. One notable exception was lower numbers of Australian Shelducks in March: they were concentrated at moulting lakes in November.

Preliminary Results (refer to final report, available 1989):

Waterfowl Species	Number Counted (rounded figures)	
	November 1988	March 1989
Black Swan	12100	22000
Freckled Duck	60	70
Australian Shelduck	76400	41800
Pacific Black Duck	14400	63400
Grey Teal	26700	134700
Chestnut Teal	640	2530
Australasian Shoveler	430	4710
Pink-eared Duck	1520	15300
Hardhead	1040	1560
Maned Duck	7570	7380
Blue-billed Duck	420	1310
Musk Duck	650	2350
Eurasian Coot	8150	50700
exotic waterfowl	490	590
WATERFOWL TOTAL	150570	348400

WATERBIRD STUDIES

SWAN COASTAL PLAIN PROJECT

We are pleased to announce that funding for this new project has been approved and that work should begin in June 1989. Financial support from the W.A. Water Authority, Dept. of Conservation & Land Management (CALM) and the Environmental Protection Authority will enable this joint RAOU-CALM research to be carried out over three years. The project is part of a multi-disciplinary study of the ecology and hydrology of 220 selected coastal wetlands, many of which may be threatened by groundwater extraction, in the region from Moore River to Bunbury.

Volunteer observers will be needed, to count waterbirds and record breeding activity, principally once every three months (each season), i.e. October, January, April and July. Waterbird data will be linked to habitat data, recorded by CALM, to analyse why and when waterbirds use particular wetlands. In addition, movements of ducks and egrets between wetlands will be studied in a trapping and marking programme.

This will be a high profile project, of great importance to conservation of wetlands and waterbirds and is another example of pioneering waterbird research by the RAOU in the West. We will be calling for volunteers in the coming months.

The most spectacular increases from November to March were in numbers of Black Swan, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck and Eurasian Coot; prolific spring breeding in flooded wetlands from Manjimup to Lake Grace (was possibly the main reason for this. In March, more than 8000 Pink-eared Ducks were counted at Dumbleyung Lake: this is the highest number counted at any south-west wetland in any RAOU survey (1981-9).

The number counted in March 1989, in comparison with the highest number from previous March Counts (1986-8), was twice as large for the Grey Teal, Chestnut Teal, Pink-eared Duck and Eurasian Coot; similar for the Black Swan, Australasian Shoveler and Hardhead; and half as large for the Freckled Duck, Maned Duck and Musk Duck. Some of these differences are due to survey methods, notably more dams surveyed in the 'random' 1986-8 Counts and better coverage of estuaries in 1989. The large increases in 1989 (Grey Teal etc.) account for the greater waterfowl total in 1989 than in the past - the previous best was 250,000 in March 1987.

Totals for the Freckled Duck, Chestnut Teal, Hardhead and Blue-billed Duck each have been less than one per cent of the waterfowl total in all March Counts.

Top wetlands in the recent Counts were as follows:

Number of Waterfowl Counted (rounded figures)	
November 1988	March 1989
Vasse-Wonnerup Est (11700)	Muir L (51600)
Preston L (9000)	Dumbleyung L (33400)
Dumbleyung L (8100)	Bokaring Sw (14400)
Peel-Harvey Est (5300)	Cooloongup L (12000)
Kubitch L (5000)	Peel-Harvey Est (11800)

In November there were 26 wetlands each holding more than 1000 waterfowl; in March there were 61. Muir Lake was dry in all previous March Counts and Dumbleyung Lake was nearly dry in March 1988.

The next Waterfowl Count should be in November 1989. We hope that all previous counters will be available!

NATURE RESERVE BOOK

South-West Nature Reserve Project, 1981-5. On 24 April 1989, representatives of the RAOU made an official presentation of the report of this project to Mr. Ian Taylor, WA Minister for Conservation and Land Management, in Perth. CALM funded the project and will use the project results in management of its reserves. A force of 140 volunteer observers made 3131 surveys to complete the project.

In 290 pages, the report (RAOU Report 30) describes the numbers and distributions of waterbirds in 300 wetlands. It is of interest to ornithologists seeking baseline data on waterbirds in the region and to bird-watchers planning an excursion or wanting to know the significance of an observation. It may be purchased from the WA Office of RAOU for \$35 (\$40 posted).

WATERBIRD DATA SET

With the addition of data from wetland surveys in the period July 1985 to June 1988, the RAOU now has waterbird data for more than 500 wetlands in south-western Australia. Some wetlands have been surveyed in each of seven years, others only once. The data do not give a complete picture of waterbird distributions and numbers, but they are a reasonable basis for development of a basic understanding of waterbird populations in the region. Interested parties may obtain the data for wetlands of concern, at a cost which varies according to the volume of data and purpose of its use, by contacting Roger Jaensch at the W.A. Office.

KIMBERLEY REVIEW

The observations of various RAOU bird-watchers and expeditions, at wetlands and grasslands in the Kimberley Division, 1981 to 1988, have been collated in a 26 page report. The report covers 47 bird species, many of which were known from very few records before 1981. It is a valuable supplement to the W.A. Museum's *Birds of the Kimberley Division* (Storr 1980), and the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (Blakers et al. 1984). It should enable visitors to the region to better understand the significance of their sightings of waterbirds and grasslandbirds; and focus attention on species that remain poorly known. Copies of the draft version may be obtained at a cost of \$5 from Roger Jaensch at the W.A. Office; the final publication should be available later in 1989. (Major W.A. contributors to the information include Tony Bush, Dot Kingston, Ken Mills, Brice Wells and Gail Hooper).

Roger Jaensch, Waterbirds Officer

OBSERVATORY REPORTS

BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

It is hard to believe that the Broome Bird Observatory has been in existence for twelve months. It has progressed from a basic condition to one of relative comfort. There is of course much still to be done to make the observatory fully operational. Further accommodation is necessary and hopefully will be available in the near future.

We are hopeful that a 20,000 gallon fibreglass tank will be in place next week and then will be filled with water carted from town. Later this year we will sink a bore for a permanent water supply.

Just before Christmas a vehicle (Toyota Landcruiser Personnel Carrier) was purchased for the Observatory. We can now transport people in numbers to and fro from Broome and take groups of people on excursions from the Observatory. The R & I Bank donated \$15,000 for the purchase. The wardens are pleased not to have to use their own vehicle for Observatory affairs any longer.

The recent raffle raised \$5,200. Ansett Airlines of WA donated air fares, Cable Beach Club and Roebuck Hotel accommodation and DeLuxe Coachlines bus fares to Broome and return. We thank the above for the donation of those prizes and Ron Johnston, Manager of Ansett WA in Broome for his arranging of them. Thanks must also go to the Friends of Broome Committee who worked so very hard in the raffle organisation and distribution of tickets for without their efforts the raffle may not have got off the ground. Thanks also to all who sold tickets.

We would also like to thank Lee Vernon from Koolan Island for organising and running a raffle for the BBO which raised \$500. The money has been used for the purchase of office equipment. BBO now has its own Management Committee in Broome; seven people make up a dynamic and committed team who will steer the BBO into an exciting future. The wardens are ex-officio members of the Committee.

The toilet and shower block donated by Lord Alastair McAlpine is almost completed and six camping bays have been cut into the bush for the dry season visitors. We have constructed an outside eating/meeting area that is relatively fly and mosquito proof which is very cool. Brice has named it 'TheMeatsafe'. We are ready to receive hosts of RAOU members who wish to come and see the delights of the northern birds. Waders are gathering in their many thousands and assuming their breeding plumage prior to their departure to the northern hemisphere; it truly is an exciting time at the Observatory.

Good rains over the last three to four weeks have ensured that the pools and ponds of Roebuck Plains are full and there should be potentially great birding areas over the next six months or so.

We have had some great bird sightings over the last four months - check the bird observation page of this newsletter for details.

The Observatory has had some good media attention of late with exposure to journalists and an appearance on The 7.30 Report. Hopefully, this will help to generate more visitors to the Observatory this year.

If you tire of chasing birds while encased in the folds of many jumpers and overcoats this winter, think of coming to Broome and discovering new birds whilst enjoying the warmth of our balmy winter days. See you soon at BBO.

G. Hooper

NOTICES

CORRECTION

In WABN No 49 March 1989 the excursion report headed Thomsons Lake (p.9) referred to "views of a Snipe Gallinago sp". This should have read "views reminiscent of Swinhoe's Snipe but the identity not determined".

RANGER AT RUDALL RIVER NATIONAL PARK

A ranger will be stationed at Rudall River National Park during the winter of 1989. Contact can be made through Hugh Chevis, Regional Manager for the Pilbara, telephone (091) 86 8288.

SLIDES RECEIVED

We recently appealed for bird slides to augment our collection. We were very pleased to receive and hereby gratefully acknowledge receipt of slides formerly owned by Geoff Curedale, deceased, of Geraldton.

SOUTHERNMOST GARGENEY

In the WA Bird Notes No. 49, March 1989, mention was made that the possible sighting in the Houtman Abrolhos would be the most southerly recorded. M. Bamford has reminded me of the sighting of P. Congreve at Yanchep in March 1971, of two Gargeneys, a male and female, at that time the only WA record of Gargeneys.

(Ed.)

EYRE COURSE

The Esperanto course at Eyre scheduled for May has been cancelled and is now planned for 15-22 October 1989.

ROAD WORK VOLUNTEERS, EYRE, EARLY WARNING

It is hoped to improve the road which descends the scarp to Eyre Bird Observatory by creating a side drain for water and by doing some levelling. The projected time is during November or December 1989 and persons are asked to consider giving a few days to this valuable work which would make the Observatory more readily accessible. Please contact Bill Graham if you can assist (PO Box 101, Scarborough 6019 tel 341 5389). Times/arrangements etc. will be settled later in conjunction with participants.

DENMARK ARTS FESTIVAL

The Denmark Arts Festival is to be held from 4-13 August 1989. Lola Broadhurst will be leading field excursions for birdwatchers as part of the programme. All welcome.

NORTHAMPTON CAMP SITE

Jim and Pearl Rogers, tel. 099 341294 or P.O. Box 1, Northampton have a naturalists/birdo camp site open between 1 June and 30 September each year. \$2 per day. Access to campsite is 4WD but orthodox vehicles will be towed in or camping gear carried to the site. No pets. Be self-contained though water available at the homestead. Walking in the area only.

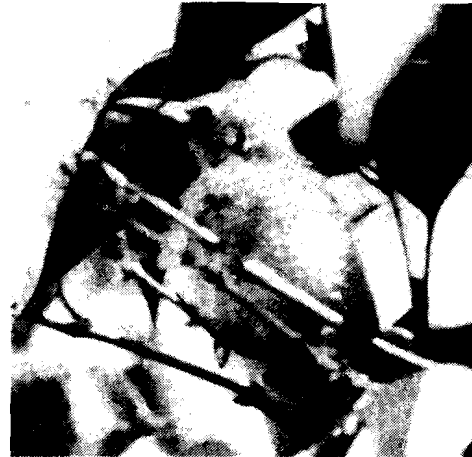
STARLING INFORMATION

Address labels of WABN subscribers have been supplied to the Agricultural Protection Board. They will send material on Starlings to all subscribers as part of the fight against Starlings obtaining a firm foothold in W.A. Note the meeting on 24 July.

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

A GARDEN IN CRANBROOK

For about 15 years we've had Spendid Fairy-wrens that come when we whistle them, and eat the cheese we feed them. They nest at least twice each year in the garden.



Brown Honeyeater saved by hair-dryer.
Photo — D Lawrence

There are 5 species of honeyeaters, including Red and Little Wattlebirds. The Singing Honeyeater, New Holland and Brown Honeyeater have nested in the garden. A Brown Honeyeater nest was only about 4 feet from the ground, so I was able to observe it

closely. Two days before the 2 eggs hatched, I chased away a Pallid Cuckoo. The eggs hatched 14th January. On the 26th January we had heavy rain overnight, next morning the chicks were cold and stiff and I thought they were dead. I brought them inside and dried them and warmed them with my hair-dryer and then gave them some honey and water, which they took, and dried out the nest with cotton wool and put the chicks back about 3 hours later. I stretched a plastic shopping bag over the top to keep any further rain off. I watched and saw a Brown Honeyeater enter the nest soon after, so that was OK. The babies only had pin feathers on their wings and a bit of down on their nearly naked bodies and eyes shut. On 2nd February they left the nest in heat wave conditions (40 degrees Celsius).

I feel like their godmother!

We've had Willie Wagtails and Grey Fantails nest in our shed using their nest, twice, this season (1988). Western Thornbills nested in a Fiddlewood near the entrance gate and also used their nest twice.

Silvereyes and Red-capped Robins nest nearby in our plantations of native trees and shrubs. A Striated Pardalote tried to nest in our home-made hotwater system, but found it too hot. We have unwelcome visits from parrots (Port Lincoln Ringneck, Western Rosella and Regent Parrot). They cut off our fruit, so we put radios, turned up loud under the trees. This keeps most of them away.

As you may have gathered we haven't any cats!! I like the birds around the place.

D. Lawrence

Readily available published information on the time to fledging even with so general a bird as the Brown Honeyeater is scarce. Mrs. Lawrence's observation, fledging on the 20th day is all the more useful. The only statement found was by Crome F (1979) in *Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds*, (Readers Digest Services, Sydney) which states (p.494) "It takes about 14 days for the eggs to hatch and about the same time for the young to reach the fledging stage".

(Ed.)

CAPE BARREN GOOSE AT BREMER BAY

A Cape Barren Goose was sighted at Bremer Bay in December 1988 on several occasions and reported in Observations for 25 December 1988. We are indebted to the owners of the property on which the Cape Barren Goose was sighted, Barbara and Wes Thomas, for the additional information that the bird arrived on a windy day from the East in October 1988 and remained until mid January. Throughout this time the goose generally remained close to one of a number of small lakes and dams, though observed on one occasion grazing with a mob of sheep. A pair of Cape Barren Geese arrived at a similar time in 1987 and also departed in mid January.

B. Buchanan

GULL-BILLED TERNS NESTING

At the time Roger Jaensch was writing his article for *Swans* (1983), Ray Garstone (1983) was writing for the *Western Australian Naturalist* on the same topic. His record is of considerable interest and gives information not readily available elsewhere. His article is reproduced below.

(Ed)



Gull-billed Tern chick, Stirling Range
Photo — Allan Rose

Notes on Nesting of Gull-billed Terns

On 3 September 1980 a flock of about 20 Gull-billed Terns was observed 1-2 kilometres west of Lake Annean swooping down below the tree tops. At first they appeared to be feeding over a small lake, however on closer observation there was no water and the birds were hunting over dry mulga scrub. The direct flights from here to some islands in the centre of the lake suggested that they were feeding young.

After walking through mud and water up to a metre deep we investigated several of the islands and found three colonies totalling some eighty pairs which contained newly hatched young and eggs.

Together with Mr. Jim Masters I returned on 12 September to investigate the birds further, and to obtain photographs.

The birds were nesting in colonies, building on the low long sand spits out in the centre of the lake. Nests were strung out in a vague line along the beaches at intervals of 2-4 metres apart. Eight different groups had formed on seven different islands. Some of the colonies contained mainly fresh eggs while others contained mainly newly hatched young. The nests in the centre section were built first with later arriving birds building on the outside. Young were already hatched in the centre section of some colonies while on the extreme outside some were still

making scrapes.

Colonies consisted of: No. 1 = 60 nests, No. 2 = 31 nests, No. 3 = 25 nests, No. 4 = 2 nests, No. 5 = 3 nests, No. 6 = 28 nests, No. 7 = 67 nests, No. 8 = 36 nests. During our four day stay a continuous loud dispute went on all day on another sand spit, and on the last day we noted that several new scrapes had been made. The 252 nests counted all contained eggs and young, and these together with the many new scrapes would indicate that there were about 600 birds present. Most nests were well made structures built of locally gathered samphire sticks and lined with finer twigs. Chips of soft stones were prominent in many nests; some of them had an elaborate pathway built to the water. The birds were observed close up from a hide actually making their scrapes and building their nests. The twigs were not carried to the nests, but picked up with the bill and tossed backwards towards the nest, then the accumulated material was built onto the nest.

Clutch size varied from one egg to five, three being common. Colour also varied, with few nests containing identical eggs. Both sexes incubated, changing often after less than one hour. The brooding birds flew off to the mainland to feed as soon as they were relieved from the nest. Grasshoppers and several species of skinks were brought back by the birds after flying several kilometres away, and these were fed to the young. Many appeared to be *Ctenotus* sp. Many of the skinks were 20 cm in length. The skinks were held in the bill by the neck although occasionally only the tail was brought in. The newly hatched young were fed grasshoppers, the skinks being fed to chicks more than a few days old. At this age the chicks leave the nest and shuffle off resting under the shade of the samphire bushes, always in company of one or both of the adults. The young swam freely yet adult birds rarely land on the water. The terns flew out at first light from the nesting colonies to fly ceaselessly over the mulga scrub in search of food. Upon locating their prey the birds swoop down hardly altering their flight, seize the prey and proceed back to the nest site. At no time did the birds make any attempt to procure food from the waters of the lake, in contrast to a group of 200 Whiskered Terns that fed continuously over the water. Occasionally the birds would swoop down to scoop up a drink of water.

All nesting birds were in full breeding plumage, although an occasional bird in juvenile plumage was seen in the vicinity. No predation of the young was observed although a Spotted Harrier was seen for twenty minutes flying near the colonies continuously being harassed by many terns. The birds defended their territories by holding their heads high, bill open exposing their bright orange gape and screaming at intruders. In general the birds often sat quietly together at the nest.

Lake Annean is a remarkable lake where in good seasons a great variety of birds gather together to breed on the many small islands. Hoary-headed Grebes were nesting everywhere; most nests contained eggs. The nests were built in samphire bushes, although many were lying high and dry where the receding water had stranded them. It was quite impossible to count the nests as many were neglected, and eggs were everywhere; many washed up on the beaches.

Black-winged Stilts were scattered over most of the islands, some brooding eggs, but most still building. Two pairs with four large chicks were observed foraging around the shores of the lake.

A small colony of ten or so had built their bulky nests on a small exposed island when we first visited, some had eggs, however when we returned a week later the eggs were gone and the colony deserted. Some 500m away they were building again, this time on samphire bushes growing in about 15cm of water, and laying had just commenced.

