

# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union



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## A RAPTOR DINNER PARTY

Lake Yangebup is about 30m beyond my window. In recent years the water level has risen killing trees and bushes whose skeletons now stand mirrored in the water. At present the Lake is being pumped down so that there is a strip of muddy shore. It was here that the following drama took place.

On 21 February 1990 at about 5.00 p.m. I looked out and saw a Marsh Harrier at the edge of the water with an Eurasian Coot in its talons. A second Marsh Harrier appeared to harass it momentarily. The second Marsh Harrier perched on a dead branch over the water, while the first dragged the Eurasian Coot along the shore a short way, before settling to tear bites off it, ripping and swinging its head forward and up so that feathers flew. In the next few minutes two Whistling Kites and two Australian Ravens flew low and harassed the feeding Marsh Harrier, but it paid little attention. Now and again, however, it would crouch and spread its wings low over the Eurasian Coot like a tent, as if it were trying to hide itself and its prey. This went on for some time.

Suddenly a Little Eagle swooped down. The Marsh Harrier took off immediately and flew away. The change-over was so smooth it was like the passing of a baton in a relay race. The Little Eagle settled on the Eurasian Coot, then dragged it through the water to a small island about a metre across and a

metre offshore. At this stage the Eurasian Coot was still alive and flapped feebly whenever the big birds stopped standing on it with their full weight. The Little Eagle settled to feed in much the same way as the Marsh Harrier had.

Twice two Black Swans sailed past about ten metres further out. When this happened the Little Eagle would crouch and tent its prey. After perhaps half an hour two Whistling Kites appeared. One flew down close enough to touch the Little Eagle and flapped its wings. The Little Eagle showed no concern, and the two Whistling Kites settled in dead trees over the water and remained there for a long time. An Australian Raven landed on the Little Eagle's island, close enough to touch. The Little Eagle postured, then resumed its feeding. The Australian Raven remained for a long time, unperturbed. At times the Little Eagle had its back to the Australian Raven which was almost touching the Little Eagle's tail; at other times the Little Eagle would half turn and feed, as if to keep an eye on the intruder.

I watched this spectacle for an hour. Then I left for 15 minutes. When I returned all the birds were gone except one of the Whistling kites still sitting in its tree over the water.

A.J. Peacey

## 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 to April 1990.

Correction in WA Bird Notes No 52 December 1989, 1 Osprey reported at Lake Monger on 15/5/88 not 15/5/89.

Compiled by Rodney Vervest.

### DOWN SOUTH

Hoary-headed Grebe - 340, 8/4/90, Lake Walyungup - JH  
Cattle Egret - 6, 15/3/90, Wiese Lake, Williams - LR \* 2, 27/3/90, Kogolup Lake - JH

Little Egret - 1, 7/3/90, Blue Gum Lake - MC \* 21, 1/4/90, Peel Inlet, Mandurah - RN

Eastern Reef Egret - 1, 23/3/90, Cape Leeuwin - GL

Rufous Night Heron - 8, Mar.90, nr. Bicton Water Polo Club: with 2 immature birds - PA

Australasian Bittern - 1, 13/2/90, Thomsons Lake - GMc

Glossy Ibis - 2, 3/3/90, Lake McLarty - RAOU excursion \* 2, 11/3/90, Herdsman Lake - RN \* 1, 25/4/90, Hurstview Lake - BBu

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 21, 14/2/90, Forrestdale Lake - GMc \* 100, 10/3/90, Lake Mealup - PW \* 1, 16/3/90, Hammond Park, Kalgoorlie - GB \* 14, 23/3/90, Molloy Island, Augusta - GL \* 220, 1/4/90, Lake Mealup - DJ \* 32, 28/4/90, Mullet Lake - CN, WN

**Freckled Duck** - 3, 16/12/89, Lake Chittering - BK \* 2, 11/3/90, Northam Town Weir (Avon River) - JMa  
**Pacific Black Duck** - 1800, 15/4/90, Tordit-garrup Lagoon - MB  
**Chestnut Teal** - Pair, 20/3/90, North Lake - SN  
**Australasian Shoveler** - 100, 18/3/90, Mogumber N.R. - JB  
**Osprey** - 1, 27/3/90, Kogolup Lake - JH  
**Square-tailed Kite** - 1, 28/10/89, Flynn Rd. The Lakes - IS et al \* 1, 6/1/90, Greenmount - IS et al \* 1, 30/3/90, over Roleystone Shopping Centre - JS, HS \* 1, 4/4/90, Canning River, Riverton - JH  
**White-bellied Sea-Eagle** - 1, 3/3/90, Lake McLarty - RAOU excursion \* 1, 3/4/90, nr. Lake McLarty - JM  
**Spotted Harrier** - 1 immature, 14/3/90, Lake Coo loongup - JH, GMc  
**Marsh Harrier** - 1, 4/4/90, Canning River, Riverton - JH \* 1, 12/4/90, Welshpool - JH  
**Peregrine Falcon** - 1, 29/1/90, Lake Coo loongup - GM \* 1 immature bird, 13/2/90, Thomsons Lake - GMc \* 1, 2/4/90, Pindathuna Stn, Murchison - PM  
**Australian Hobby** - 2, 15/3/90, Craigie - CW  
**Mallee Fowl** - 1, July/August 89, Great Northern Highway, nr. Ninghan Station - CP \* 3 (1 pair & 1 single bird), 1/4/90, Dryandra - JS, HS  
**Buff-banded Rail** - Pair, 7/2/90, Riverton Bridge: with 5 young - JH  
**Baillon's Crake** - 2, 22/3/90, Thomsons Lake - JH \* 1, 30/3/90, Lake McLarty - JH  
**Australian Crake** - 2, 30/3/90, Lake McLarty - JH  
**Spotless Crake** - 1 dead bird, 19/1/90, Westfield Park Primary School Swamp, Kelmscott - GM \* 1, 25/2/90, Westfield Park Primary School Swamp, Kelmscott - GM \* 1, 7/3/90, Lake Monjilup nr. Esperance - GB  
**Purple Swamphen** - 200+, 22/3/90, Thomsons Lake - JH, TK  
**Australian Bustard** - 2, 12/11/89, Sheoak Rock - IS et al  
**Bush Thick-knee** - 2, 13/3/90, Dryandra - BW  
**Hooded Plover** - Pair, 18/3/90, Lake Preston: with 2 very young chicks - BB \* 1, 25/4/90, Bodey's Swamp, Wannamal - BBu \* 45, 5/5/90, Stokes Inlet - CN, WN  
**Large Sand Plover** - 1, 13/3/90, Lake Coo loongup - GM  
**Black-fronted Plover** - 54, 17/3/90, Nth Kogolup Lake - DJ \* 52, 27/3/90, Kogolup Lake - JH \* 67, 8/4/90, Amarillo Pool - JH, TK  
**Black-winged Stilt** - 800+, 13/2/90, Thomsons Lake - GMc  
**Banded Stilt** - 12, 14/2/90, Forrestdale Lake - GMc \* c.1000, 28/4/90, Mullet Lake - CN, WN  
**Red-necked Avocet** - 1, 27/1/90, Hurstview Lake - BBu \* 350, 3/3/90, Lake McLarty - RAOU excursion  
**Eastern Curlew** - 5, 17/2/90, Leschenault Inlet - DW, TK  
**Whimbrel** - 1, 23/3/90, Cape Leeuwin - GL  
**Wood Sandpiper** - 1, 11/2/90, Yangebup Lake - GMc \* 38, 3/3/90, Lake McLarty - RAOU excursion \* 22, 12/3/90, Hurstview Lake - BBu \* 24, 14/3/90, Amarillo Pool - JH, GMc \* 2, 15/3/90, Kogolup Lake - PH \* 1, 17/3/90, Lake Claremont - DM \* 10, 22/3/90, Thomsons Lake - JH  
**Marsh Sandpiper** - 15/3/90, Thompson Lake - PH  
**Black-tailed Godwit** - 14, 3/3/90, Lake McLarty - RAOU excursion \* 17, 30/3/90, Lake McLarty - JH  
**Red Knot** - 12 (3 in breeding plumage), 5/5/90, Stokes Inlet - CN, WN  
**Pectoral Sandpiper** - 1, 3/2/90, Amarillo Pool - JH et al \* 1, 14/3/90, Amarillo Pool - JH, GMc  
**Long-toed Stint** - 1, 7/1/90, Lake Coo loongup - GM \* 3, 14/3/90, Amarillo Pool - JH, GMc \* 5, 8/4/90, Amarillo Pool - JH  
**Ruff** - 1, Feb 90, Forrestdale Lake - DJ, TK \* 1, 24/2/90, Namming Lake - BBu  
**Australian Pratincole** - 1 pair, 8/10/89, 18km E of Reid on Nullarbor - JR  
**White-winged Black Tern** - 120, 13/2/90, Thomsons Lake - GMc \* 150, 27/3/90, Thomsons Lake - JH \* 3, 5/4/90, Wonnerup Estuary - RP  
**Gull-billed Tern** - 1, 17/2/90, Leschenault Inlet - DW, TK  
**Roseate Tern** - 12, 1/4/90, Golden Bay - GM \* 8, 1/4/90, north of Singleton Beach - RN  
**Brush Bronzewing** - 1, 15/4/90, Dwellingup - GA  
**Little Corella** - 180+, 22/4/90, Bayswater - TA  
**Regent Parrot** - 50, 13/4/90, Dawsville - JM  
**Elegant Parrot** - 40+, 10/3/90, Pinjarra - JS, HS  
**Pallid Cuckoo** - 1, 2/4/90, ~~Cooloolup Stn, Murchison~~ - PM \* 1, 9/4/90, Lake Joondalup Nth - GL, CW  
**Fan-tailed Cuckoo** - 1, 27/4/90, Beermullah Lake - BBu  
**Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** - 1, 11/2/90, Yangebup Lake - GMc  
**Southern Boobook** - 1, 6/3/90 & 7/4/90, Yokine - IS, BWi  
**Spotted Nightjar** - 2, 11/11/89, Sheoak Rock - IS et al \* 3, 15/4/90, Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve - GM  
**Fork-tailed Swift** - 200+, 10-14/3/90, Geraldton Lighthouse - AS \* 50, 18/3/90, Kelmscott Scarp - GM \* 7, 18/3/90, Neerabup National Park - CW \* 178+, 23/3/90, Drummonds Cove - PM \* 6, 31/3/90, Yokine - IS, BWi \* 20, 1/4/90, Yokine - IS, BWi \* 200+, 1/4/90, Craigie - CW \* 150, 1/4/90, Beldon - JP \* 8-10, 1/4/90, Roleystone - EK \* 200+, 1/4/90, Roleystone - SN \* 3, 1/4/90, Bold Park - RN \* 15-20+, 1/4/90, Peel Inlet, Mandurah - RN \* 60+, 1/4/90, Lancelin - DB \* 150, 9/4/90, Lake Joondalup Nth - GL, CW \* 50, 10/4/90, Roleystone - EK \* 100+, 18/4/90, Queens Park - JH \* 50+, 19/4/90, Canning Vale - JH  
**Red-backed Kingfisher** - 1, 9/11/89, Junction of Southern Cross-Lake King-Hyden-Norseman Rds - IS et al  
**Sacred Kingfisher** - 1, 8/10/89, 12km E of Reid on Nullarbor - JR \* 1, 19/10/89, Loonganna Townsite - JR  
**Rainbow Bee-eater** - 44, 28/1/90, Drummonds Cove - PM  
**White-winged Triller** - 2, 11/2/90, Yangebup Lake - GMc  
**Scarlet Robin** - 1 (male), 17/10/89, Forrest Aerodrome - JR  
**Crested Shrike-tit** - 1, 28/10/89, Flynn Rd. The Lakes - IS et al \* 1 female, 11/11/89, Junction of Southern Cross-Lake King-Hyden-Norseman Rds - IS et al \* present, 13/3/90, Dryandra BW \* 1, 29/3/90, Shannon River National Park - GL  
**Gilbert's Whistler** - 1 male, 8/11/89, & 1 male, 1 female, 11/11/89, Junction of Southern Cross-Lake King-Hyden-Norseman Rds - IS et al \* 1 female, 10/11/89, Lake Johnston - IS et al  
**Crested Bellbird** - 1, 29/3/90, Shannon River National Park - GL  
**Chestnut Quail-thrush** - 3, 9/11/89, Junction of Southern Cross-Lake King-Hyden-Norseman Rds - IS et al \* 4, 10/11/89, Lake Johnston - IS et al \* 2, 10/11/89, Scamp Rock - IS et al  
**Cinnamon Quail-thrush** - 1, 2/4/90, Pindathuna Stn, Murchison - PM  
**Red-winged Fairy-wren** - 9-10, 6/1/90, Wungong Gorge - BB et al

**Southern Emu-wren** - 1, 24/2/90, Ellis Brook, Martin - DJ  
**Redthroat** - 2 pairs, 14/12/89, Hamersley Inlet, Fitzgerald River National Park - RP

**Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** - 2, 29/3/90, Shannon River National Park - GL \* 1, 2/4/90, Stony Brook, Roleystone - RS

**Grey-fronted Honeyeater** - 1, 28/4/90, Wannamal townsite - BBu

**White-cheeked Honeyeater** - 6, Feb.90, Hollywood Reserve - AM

**White-fronted Chat** - 10, 13/3/90, nr. Westfield Park Primary School Swamp, Kelmscott - GM

**Spotted Pardalote** - 5+ including 2 immatures, 2/12/89, Wungong Gorge - IS et al

**Red-eared Firetail** - 7+ including 2+ juveniles or immatures, 2/12/89, Wungong Gorge - IS et al \* 10-12, 6/1/90, Wungong Gorge BB et al \* 4+ immatures or juveniles, 27/1-29/1/90, Dwellingup IS et al \* 2, 24/2/90, Ellis Brook, Martin - DJ \* 20-30, 24/3/90, Wungong Gorge - BB, MC

**Australian Magpie-lark** - nesting, 2/4/90, Gabyon Stn, Murchison PM

**Grey Currawong** - 2, 3/3/90, Wandi Reserve, Wandi - DJ

#### UP NORTH

**Blue-billed Duck** - 2 females or immatures, 30/12/89, Lake Eda, Broome - IS et al

**Black-breasted Buzzard** - 1 dark phase, 22/12/89, 100km south of The Overlander Roadhouse - IS et al

**Sanderling** - 1, 25/12/89, Cable Beach, Broome - IS et al

**Gull-billed Tern** - 2, 24/12/89, De Grey River crossing on Great Northern Highway - IS et al

**Little Bronze-cuckoo** - 1, 31/12/89, Broome Sewerage Works - IS et al

**Yellow Wagtail** - 2, 25/12/89, Roebuck Bay Caravan Park - IS et al

**Cinnamon Quail-thrush** - 2, 5/1/90, The Granites, Mt Magnet - IS, BWi

**Slaty-backed Thornbill** - 4-5, 5/1/90, The Granites, Mt Magnet - IS, BWi

**Black-chinned Honeyeater** - 2, 4/1/90, Marble Bar - IS et al

**Banded Honeyeater** - 1, 1/1/90, Barred Creek nr. Broome - IS et al

**Painted Firetail** - 60+, 23/12/89, Ashburton River crossing - IS et al \* in small groups totalling 60+, 4/1/90, Marble Bar - IS et al

**Star Finch** - 150-200, 4/1/90, Marble Bar - IS et al

#### KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

|                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| AM - Aubrey Moore     | JB - John Blyth      |
| AS - Alex Scarff      | JH - Jack Hunt       |
| BB - Bryan Barrett    | JM - John Malcolm    |
| BBu - Bruce Buchanan  | JMa - Jim Masters    |
| BK - Brad Kneebone    | JP - Julian Pegler   |
| BW - Brian Wilson     | JR - John Rodger     |
| BWi - Bev Wilcox      | JS - John Start      |
| CN - Clive Napier     | LR - Lawrence Rose   |
| CP - Colin Payne      | MB - Mary Bremner    |
| CW - Chris Wilder     | MC - Margery Clegg   |
| DB - Diane Beckingham | PA - Peter Anson     |
| DJ - David James      | PH - Peel Howden     |
| DM - Dusty Millar     | PM - Peter Mack      |
| DW - Doug Watkins     | PW - Peter Wilmot    |
| EK - Elizabeth King   | RN - Richard Nowotny |
| GA - George Agar      | RP - Ross Payton     |

GB - Greg Barrett  
GL - Graham Little  
GM - George Miller  
GMc - Gordon McDonald  
HS - Helen Start  
IS - Ian Standring

RS - Rod Smith  
SN - Simon Neville  
TA - T. Austin  
TK - Tony Kirkby  
WN - Wendy Napier

## WATERBIRD STUDIES

### WATERBIRD STUDIES

#### TWELVE MONTHS IN THE PITS

Recent negotiations between the Waterbirds Officer and ALCOA of Australia have resulted in a 12-month waterbird study at ALCOA's Wellard clay-pit. This follows from recommendations made earlier by the RAOU (see RAOU Report No. 26, 1986).

Local ornithologist, Ben Carr has been employed as Project Officer and detailed surveys of waterbirds and bush birds have already commenced.

Included in the regular survey work are some spot-lighting surveys (for nocturnal birds) and (later in the year) evening listenings for crakes and bitterns.

Any people interested in helping out with these surveys or simply interested in visiting this unique wetland, should contact Rodney Vervest at the RAOU office.

#### SCOPEWEST

Analysis of the October, January and April data is now underway and a preliminary report will be posted soon.

There have been many reports of wing-tagged spoonbills, ibis and egrets along with nasal-tagged ducks. These reports are giving us important information on movements of birds and the types of wetlands they use at different times.

Chris Wilder and Sue Kelly have contributed much to the data entry aspects of SCOPEWEST and I am most grateful for their willing help. Allan Burbidge from CALM devised the computer program to accept the data and this is running smoothly. Thanks Allan!

Once this initial batch of data is analysed I hope to be able to report back to you more frequently. The next SCOPEWEST survey is in July and I look forward to your participation then.

#### ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNT

Once again thank you all for your efforts with this project.

Data entry and partial analysis for March 1990 will be completed soon. If you do have outstanding data, it is not too late to send it in but please do so promptly.

As many of you will be aware, early rains dispersed waterfowl far and wide and it will be very interesting to note the effects this has had on numbers. Dumbleyung Lake provides an example in that counts in March 89 were over 33,000 and in March 90 less than 1,000 birds were tallied.

Parts of the Esperance, Ravensthorpe and Bremer Bay districts had more water in March than in November. One observer in Esperance reported '30 feet' of water over the track leading to one wetland.

There is a wealth of anecdotal information supplied on data sheets, a lot of which would probably make an amusing book!

One observer conducted a 1.1/2 hour survey wearing only 'hat and binoculars', due to the necessity of being 'dry' at a meeting in a country centre. Such fortitude has rarely been paralleled.

Tales of encounters with snakes, bulls and dogs are common but all invariably handled with the deftness and 'fleet of foot' acquired through being an RAOU duck counter.

The technical attributes of the Waterbirds Officer himself were recently demeaned in the eyes of his colleagues, when his vessel sank some distance from shore. The decision to go 'public' with this information is done in an effort to head off a steady and progressively widening flow of jocularly aimed at the Waterbirds Officer from certain circles.

Please note, the vessel has since been recovered.

**Rodney Vervest**  
Captain, Duck Brigade

## LOCAL RAOU AUSTRALIAN BIRD COUNT ACTIVITIES

Stephen Ambrose, Co-ordinator of the ABC Project, will be in Perth 16-24 July (inclusive). This will be your chance to catch up with him in connection with the ABC Project by taking part in one or more ABC activities.

**9.30 am - 2.30 pm (approx.), Tuesday 17 July 1990**

Venue: Meet at King's Park War Memorial

Activity: Bird counts in King's Park

Will suit people who like to bird watch in a leisurely manner, as well as the active birder. Bring your own lunch.

**9.00 am onwards, Sunday 22 July 1990**

Venue: Meet outside entrance to Sloane Cottage, Wellard Road, Leda.

**8.00 pm, Monday 23 July 1990 - RAOU Meeting**

Stephen will be presenting the results of the honeyeater banding trip to the Nullarbor. However, he will also talk about the progress of the ABC Project (using examples from WA counts) with the help of Michelle Christy.

## NOTICES

### RAOU CONGRESS 1991

#### The Conservation of Australian Birds

Notification of the Congress was given in the previous issue of WA Bird Notes but the dates were inadvertently omitted.

Please note the Congress is from Friday 20 September to Sunday 22 September 1991. The campout is from Sunday 22 September until Friday 27 September.

### RAOU CONGRESS 1991

**- Friday 20 September - Sunday 22 September**

#### The Conservation of Australian Birds

It is requested that those who wish to present papers at the Congress contact Allan Burbidge as soon as possible. The task of co-ordinating papers is one which has to be attended to promptly in order that other deadlines may be met. At this stage of planning a brief statement of intent is all that is required.

Please contact Allan at: **Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road  
CANNING BRIDGE WA 6153**

### EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY - WARDENS FOR 1991

Gwen and Graham Goodreid, currently wardens at Eyre, will complete their term in January 1991. New wardens will then be required. Anybody who is interested in an interesting post is invited to contact:

**Eyre Management Committee**  
Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road  
CANNING BRIDGE WA 6153  
(09) 364 6202

Early contact with prospective wardens is desirable.

### LOGO COMPETITION - RAOU CONGRESS 1991

Next year's Congress in Perth requires a logo. The organisers invite those who are interested to submit drawings of the subject, the Western Spinebill, incorporating into the design some aspect of its natural environment such as a food plant. Other requirements are that it should be readily reproducible in black and white, and it will be for the exclusive use by the RAOU. Entries must be received no later than Friday 13th July. The results will be published in the September 1990 issue of WABN.

The prize for the winning entrant will be free registration for the Congress. Artwork and queries are to be directed to:

**The Organiser**

**RAOU Congress 1991**

**Room 218, 15 Ogilvie Road**

**CANNING BRIDGE WA 6153**

### SEABIRD SLIDE LIBRARY

The WA Group has been informed of the availability of a catalogued list of slides of seabirds being offered for mail-order sale. Interested readers should note that the service is based in the UK and the birds are of that region.

Details may be obtained by ringing 364 6202.

### THE FORKTAIL-LEICA AWARD

Leica UK have generously donated 500 pounds sterling for this award in 1990. The Forktail-Leica award will be given to a project which fits one or more of the following categories:-

1. A forest survey useful for conservation.
2. A survey or study of globally-threatened species.
3. A study of a little-known protected area.
4. Conservation education which has an emphasis on birds.

Project applications are welcomed from individuals and non-affiliated groups, as well as groups organised by a conservation organisation or university. Applications from nationals in the Orient region (which can include the support of an on-going project) are particularly encouraged.

The closing date for applications is 15th August 1990. The winning project will be announced in December.

Applications, which should include a summary of objectives and details of implementation, should be sent to **The Conservation Officer, Oriental Bird Club, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds. SG19 2DL, UK.**

### SURVEY GRANTS

Information on the habitats, status and migration routes of many Oriental birds, and the threats they are facing, is urgently required for use by Departments of Wildlife Conservation and National Parks, by national bird clubs and by other non-governmental societies and organisations. OBC members can make valuable contributions by undertaking surveys. Examples include:

1. Contributing to check-lists of poorly-known protected areas held on national database.
2. Surveys of habitat types which are currently unprotected in the country concerned.
3. Surveys of threatened or little-known species.
4. Identification of migration stop-over sites.

There are opportunities for surveys lasting from a few days to a few months. Oriental Bird Club members visiting or living in the Oriental region are asked to consider undertaking a survey. The OBC will award small grants each year to facilitate and encourage such survey work. The grant will be towards

alleviating the extra expenses incurred in reaching remote areas, hiring local guides etc, and is unlikely to exceed 250 pounds sterling. Applications, which should include a summary of the survey's objectives and details of implementation, will be considered at any time during the year.

### OBC MEMBERSHIP

RAOU members may be interested in joining the OBC which publishes two informative bulletins and an excellent journal, 'Forktail', annually. The Membership Secretary's address is OBC c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds SG19 2DL, UK.

### MT LESUEUR BROCHURE

The Chairman would like to thank members who have made a donation towards the cost of producing the brochure being prepared by the Mt Lesueur Forum in opposition to the proposed coal mine/power station.

### PHOTOGRAPHS NEEDED

Jim Lane of CALM's Wildlife Research Centre (Woodvale) is seeking high quality photographs of albatross in flight, preferably Wandering Albatross, and Australian Kestrel hovering, for use in the next issue of 'Landscape'. If you can assist, contact Jim on 405 5100.

## MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

### MORE AUSTRALIAN RAVEN STORAGE BEHAVIOUR

After reading the article on unusual behaviour of an Australian Raven by G. Marston in the March 1990 issue of WABN No. 53 I thought the following observation may be of interest.

While sitting in our car at the picnic area at The Loop on the Murchison River near Kalbarri, we saw an Australian Raven being thrown food scraps by other picnickers. After a short time the bird had apparently eaten its fill. It then proceeded to walk a few metres with the surplus food in its beak. It then scraped a small hole in the loose soil with its beak, dropped the food into it, then covered it with soil and placed a small stone or stick on top of it. This it did several times, selecting a different spot each time.

H.B. Gibbs

### INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS AT CAPE ARID NATIONAL PARK

As part of the expedition organised by Stephen Ambrose to band honeyeaters on the southern edge of the Nullarbor, we spent the 5th to 21st of January in Cape Arid National Park.

The National Park is quite large (about 310,000 hectares), but we concentrated our efforts in two areas: The Boolenup Walk Trail, near the coast in the south-western corner of the National Park, and at Mt Ragged which is about 50km from the coast and reached only by 4WD.

Most of our time was spent catching and banding birds, but during the 17 days of our stay we recorded 62 of the approximately 170 species which have been recorded in the park. The most interesting of our records are listed below.

**Square-tailed Kite** - one foraging low over mallee woodland (*Eucalyptus cooperiana*) about 3km southwest of Mt Ragged (15th January) and one (or possibly two) foraging low over Swamp Yates (*E. occidentalis*) and *Banksia media* on the Boolenup trail (16th and 18th).

**Hooded Plover** - several sightings including a group of three

adults and three immatures on the beach at Yokinup Bay on the 9th.

**Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo** - 10-15 flying over the Boolenup Trail on the 7th; this is an eastern range extension of about 25km from the limit noted by Storr (1987) where he states that the easternmost known record is from 20km ESE of Condingup.

**Purple-crowned Lorikeet** - 100's in flowering mallees (*Eucalyptus cooperiana*) 3-5km southwest of Mt Ragged (10th and 15th) in an area where very few had been recorded in previous visits during spring and autumn.

**Sacred Kingfisher** - two near the waterhole at Junana Rock (about 10km north of Mt Ragged)(10th) and one about 6km south west of Mt Ragged (15th), near the limit of its usual range in the south-west.

**Richard's Pipit** - on the 15th we saw about 100, including one flock of about 50, one of about 20 and two of about 10, on the road within a distance of less than 30km, near the junction of Fisheries Road and the Balladonia road (in farmland outside the park) in an area where less than 10 were seen on the 10th.

**Rufous Songlark** - one at Junana Rock was an unusual record for this area (in the National Park it has only been recorded at Junana Rock and Pine Hill).

**Scarlet Robin** - an immature male on the Boolenup Trail; this is within five km of the eastern limit for this species in Western Australia.

**Western Yellow Robin** - several records at Mt Ragged and at the Boolenup Trail.

**Blue-breasted Fairy-wren** - about 5km southwest of Mt Ragged and at Junana Rock on the 10th; these are the only two localities known for this species in the park.

**Purple-gaped Honeyeater** - common at Mt Ragged. **White-cheeked Honeyeater** - at Mt Ragged on the 14th; this is the farthest inland record for this part of the bird's range.

**Red-eared Firetail** - one (or, probably, two) on the Boolenup Trail; this is within five km of the easternmost limit for this species.

As the National Park is currently being surveyed by research staff from CALM, any information from other observers is also of interest. If you have any information, please send any bird- lists to Clive Napier for the RAOU National Parks Birdlists project, or else contact Allan Burbidge.

A. Burbidge & J. Talbot

Reference: Storr J M (1987) *Birds of the Eucla Division of Western Australia*, Records of the Western Australian Museum Supplement No 27, WA Museum.

### EARLY MORNING ENCOUNTER

At about 7.30 a.m. on Tuesday March 13th 1990, I was on an early morning walk near the settlement at Dryandra State Forest when I saw a Bush Thick-knee standing and looking at me from about 20 metres away from the middle of the track at the back of the caretaker's cottage. The track lies about 100 metres from the cottage. Obviously wary, the bird ran in small bursts away from me, to disappear in low bushes with a second bird which I had not previously noticed. I assumed that the birds would then scurry away in the undergrowth and that this was the last I would see of them. To my surprise, when I reached the bushes, the two birds (with a low squawk) took flight from the point where they had entered, with each bird going in a different direction. The one that I followed with binoculars flew along the line of cottages and appeared to land about 150 metres away, but was not to be seen when I followed

up. An unexpected encounter.

B. Wilson

### **FORK-TAILED SWIFTS AT BREMER BAY**

Three friends undertook to count ducks for the March 1990 Duck Count in the Bremer Bay area. Arriving the night of the 5th March, we agreed to an early start as a cyclone was approaching from the north.

With this weather pattern in mind we had made a mental note to watch for Fork-tailed Swifts during the day. These birds are often associated with atmospheric disturbances.

At just after 9am we sighted two swifts over a small wetland. Soon after another 30 were seen in the same place. A short time after this we returned to our base (Bremer Bay Caravan Park) and there we observed Fork-tailed Swifts were passing close by continuously. We endeavoured to keep a tally.

There appeared to be one large group of Fork-tailed Swifts moving through slowly. At any one time there were approximately 150 in sight and the procession was apparently endless.

During the remainder of the day we saw Fork-tailed Swifts all over the Bremer Bay area and whilst we were looking for seabirds from the cliffs in later afternoon, swifts were flying so low above our heads that we did not need our binoculars.

We had no way of knowing how many birds were present but whatever the number it was a sight we will never forget.

J. Hunt, G. Little, C. Wilder

### **BROWN FALCONS HUNTING**

On 14th April, while boating on the Blackwood River about 1km downstream from Wild Horse Swamp Nature Reserve, a Pacific Black Duck flew upstream at about 30 metres high. It was being followed by a Brown Falcon which was about 75 metres behind. Their speeds were well matched but every time the duck turned the falcon cut the corner and gained a little.

About half a minute later they flew, at the same height, downstream, but this time there were two Brown Falcons in pursuit. The Pacific Black Duck had managed to do a 180 degree turn without being caught and we could not imagine how. All disappeared downstream and we felt the duck had little hope of escape. But we were wrong.

About two minutes later both Brown Falcons reappeared flying upstream in hot pursuit of a Little Black Cormorant which, just before it reached our boat, plunged straight into the river and disappeared.

The Brown Falcons circled and gained height before flying downstream again. A little later, as we rounded a bend in the river, we saw a number of duck on the water with both Brown Falcons perched in a dead tree nearby. The duck seemed quite unconcerned. Are they safe while on the water or were the Brown Falcons just resting before renewing the hunt?

J. & H. Start

### **OPPORTUNISTIC USE OF INLAND OCCASIONAL WETLANDS**

During the March Great Duck Count because of the increased rainfall during January and February 1990, many unusually dry lakes and occasional wetlands yielded many surprises.

Travelling west from Dowerin along Sanders Rd about 200m from Cemetary Road junction 31 12 117 06 the road was impassable. There were 50 Red-tailed Black Cockatoos screeching overhead when suddenly, having been disturbed by our car, a large cloud of over 300 ducks rose from the water and swirled back and forth just above the treetops. They eventually settled back on the water: an area of about 150m square. There were 350 Grey Teal together with a few Australian Shelduck,

Chestnut Teal, Pink-eared Duck and Pacific Black Duck. On this newly formed wetland there were also 40 Black-winged Stilt and two to ten each of Pacific and White-faced Herons, Sacred and Straw-necked Ibis, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Australasian Grebe and Black-fronted Plover.

Other surprises because of the higher water levels resulted from submerged and newly emerged sandbanks. Gone was the sandbank on Lake Walyormouring which often holds up to 10,000 Banded Stilts, but a new sandbank on Lake Nambling to the south held 800 Banded Stilts and 700 Red-necked Avocets.

Of interest also were the Fork-tailed Swifts: eight flying over at Lake Walyormouring and fifteen at Bookerbidey swamp to the south.

M.H. Bremner

### **LANE POOLE RESERVE**

Recently my wife and I spent 2 days camping at Tony's Bend in the Lane Poole Reserve near Dwellingup.

Late on the first day, Ingrid reported seeing a wren of different colouration to others seen around the campsite (Splendid and Red-winged Fairy-wrens) - dark in colour with white wings. She identified the bird as a White-winged Fairy-wren from a reference book.

Twice the following day what appeared to be male White-winged Fairy-wrens crossed in front of the car, about three and eight kilometres from the campsite.

Later that day when I went to the river for water, a male White-winged Fairy-wren flew onto the path ahead of me, pecked around briefly, flew up into a bush and paused for some seconds before flying off. I was about 3 metres from the bird - it being clearly visible for about 15 seconds.

According to Blakers M, Davies S J J F and Reilly P N (1984) "The Atlas of Australian Birds", RAOU, Melbourne University, these wrens are "absent from eucalypt forest, but does enter some open woodland" (p441). The three possible and one definite sighting we made, however, were in dense, heavily re-grown eucalypt forest with thick understorey.

Considering the distance between the sightings (all male birds) and the time intervals, three or possibly four birds were seen.

It is possible, therefore, that there is a small colony or colonies of the White-winged Fairy-wren existing in an area of the south-west from where they have not been previously reported.

J.G. Little

### **AUSTRALIAN MAGPIE**

In response to R.J. and M.N. Brown's query on the decline in numbers of the Australian Magpie, I think that the decline has not been slow but rather rapid.

In South Perth numbers have fallen in the last one and a half to two years. Now I only see the odd lone bird, compared to five years ago.

In 1986 there were at least half a dozen, possibly more, family groups based on the Royal Perth Golf Course. In Hensman Street itself there was one group which regularly fed on the nature strips. I have not seen these birds since July last year.

There is a large amount of parkland at Royal Perth Rehabilitation Hospital. The number of Australian Magpie here has decreased sharply since September last year.

There appears to have been an increase in the population of Australian Raven and this may account for the decline in Australian Magpie numbers.

M. Whackett