



Western Australian Bird Notes

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

RAOU CONGRESS 1991 September 20 - 22



The RAOU Congress and Campout are exciting annual events which are being hosted this year by the WA Group. The Congress is on the weekend commencing Friday evening, September 20th at Kingswood College, Crawley. On Sunday afternoon 22nd September campout participants travel to Albany for activities which continue until Friday 27th September 1991.

Over eighty persons have registered for either the Congress, the Campout or both. Twenty four are coming from other states and more registrations are expected in the months ahead.

The Congress has a varied and interesting programme which will include twenty talks and a number of posters. Topics to be covered will range from the conservation and biology of seabirds to the feeding, breeding and other aspects of the biology of endemic species of the South-west of WA, including the Red-eared Firetail and Noisy Scrub-bird. Other talks will cover projects in which RAOU members can be involved: the Australian Bird Count, WA National Park Birdlist and self-organised projects.

Most of the people attending the Campout will have booked their accommodation at the Panorama Caravan Park and Cottages in Albany. This caravan park is on the beach in Princess Royal Harbour and is near bushland and Torndirrup National Park. As well as visits to that and other nearby National Parks an organised search for Noisy Scrub-bird at Mt Taylor is planned. The Mt Taylor population has recently been boosted by translocation of a number of birds from Two Peoples Bay. Our searches and counts of Noisy Scrub-bird during the Campout will form part of the ongoing monitoring of this endangered species, as part of the management programme being carried out by CALM.

Thirty six Campout participants so far have indicated an interest in a seabirding trip. Arrangements for this need be flexible due to weather and it is expected that more than one trip will be arranged, with both half-day and full-day trips. On-board refreshments will be available.

A full programme of the activities throughout the week will be published. This will be available closer to the time of the Campout.

If you plan to attend either the Congress or Campout and have not yet registered please contact the Congress organisers soon - tel. 09 364 6202

R. Smith

OBSERVATIONS

Please send details of sightings to 'Observations Officer' at the W.A. Office of the RAOU. Please provide details of number, location, date and other relevant notes. 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 1991.

Compiled by Rodney Vervest.

DOWN SOUTH

Great Crested Grebe - 1, 7/3/91, Alfred Cove - MC
Great-winged Petrel - 6, 17/2/91, off Leschenault Peninsular just south of Binningup - GS

White-chinned Petrel - 3, 7/4/91, 2 Mile Reef off Whitfords - GL

Flesh-footed Shearwater - 12+ dead, 27/2/91, West Cape Howe National Park - AJ, RJ

Little Shearwater - 1 beachwashed, 27/2/91, West Cape Howe National Park - AJ, RJ

Australian Pelican - 500, 8/5/91, Lake Inoon - MW

Australasian Gannet - 2, 1/4/91, Fremantle North Mole - TK
Masked Booby - 1 immature, 21/3/91, nr Sugar Loaf Hill, Busselton - LR

Least Frigatebird - 1, 22/4/91, Mindarie Keys - AB * 1, 23/4/91, Hillarys Marina - KJ

Australasian Bittern - 1, 9/3/91, Grahams Pool - JE

Glossy Ibis - 14, 27/2/91, Lake Joondalup North - CW, GL * 1, 30/3/91, Boyup Brk - GL * 2, 3/5/91, Herdsman Lk. - SF, AF

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ADVICE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The Editor requests contributors to note the following -

- * copy concerning W.A. birds may be published; sightings etc in respect of birds outside W.A. will not normally be included.
- * write legibly or type, DOUBLE SPACED.
- * use RAOU recommended English names for W.A. birds - a list is available at the W.A. RAOU Office.
- * copy will be edited where considered appropriate.

**DEADLINE FOR SEPTEMBER 1991 ISSUE
IS FRIDAY 19TH JULY 1991**

Eastern Reef Egret - 1 grey phase, 17/3/91 & 14/4/91, Lake Monger - BS, IS
Royal Spoonbill - 1, 4/5/91, Bayswater Bird Sanctuary - HVW
Yellow-billed Spoonbill - 163, 18/2/91, Lake McLarty - MCr
Maggie Goose - 1, 28/4/91, north of Whitfords Sea Sports Club - GL
Freckled Duck - 2, 29/3/91 and 7/4/91, Amarillo Pool - TK, JH * 1, 13/5/91, Lake Gwelup - KJ
Chestnut Teal - 1, 6/3/91, Greenough River estuary - CW * 1, mid March, Perth Zoo Lake - NH * 1, 1/5/91, Lake Joondalup North - CW
Square-tailed Kite - 1, 10/3/91, Bungendore Park - BB et al
White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, 6/4/91, Nine Mile Lake NR (Murray Shire) - RV, DWa, DA
Spotted Harrier - 1, 9/3/91, Woodman Point - MC, BB
Australian Hobby - 1 taking dragonflies, 14/4/91, Ventnor Street, Scarborough - BP
Painted Button-quail - 1, 22/3/91, Dryandra - GL
Baillon's Crake - 2, 28/1/91, Bibra Lake - RG, SG * 1, 17/3/91, Crackers Swamp - RS
Purple Swamphen - 451, 16/2/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH
Australian Bustard - 1, 25/2/91, Picton - GS * 1, 29/4/91, Herne Hill - HM * up to 3 birds, 9-12/5/91, Della Road, Woodvale - CW, JS
Red-kneed Dotterel - 12, 17/3/91, Crackers Swamp - RS
Large Sand Plover - 2, 4/5/91, East Breakwater, Mandurah - SF, AF
Inland Dotterel - Immature, 28/2/91, Alfred Cove - JD * 1, 13/3/91, WA Water Ski Park, Baldvis - FO
Red-necked Avocet - 3,000, 10/2/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH * 1790, 18/2/91, Lake McLarty - MCr
Eastern Curlew - 5, 6/4/91, Leschenault Inlet - RV, DWa, DA * 2, 4/5/91, East Breakwater, Mandurah - SF, AF
Whimbrel - 1, 21/2/91, Penguin Island - TK
Wood Sandpiper - 60+, 14/3/91, Kogolup Lake - JH et al * 40, 7/4/91, Amarillo Pool - TK
Common Sandpiper - 1, 15/3/91, Erindale Pond - NB, EM
Greenshank - 45, 17/3/91, Mandogallup Lake - NG
Marsh Sandpiper - 6, 10/2/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH * 1,

9/3/91, Numberkine/Jennacubbine area - JM
Terek Sandpiper - 1, 5/3/91, Greenough River estuary - CW * 12, 6/4/91, lagoon on North East edge of Peel Inlet - RV, DWa, DA
Black-tailed Godwit - 28, 7/4/91, Amarillo Pool - TK
Pectoral Sandpiper - 1, 10/2/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH
Great Knot - 130, 13/1/91, Alfred Cove - BS, IS
Long-toed Stint - 20, 10/2/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH * 90, 18/2/91, Lake McLarty - MCr * 5, 12/3/91, Korup Swamp - RV, BC * 45, 16/3/91, Kogolup Lake - TK, JH
Ruff - 1, 10/2/91, 16/2/91, 10/3/91, Thomsons Lake - TK, JH * 1, 18/2/91, Lake McLarty - MCr
Great Skua - 1, 1/4/91, Fremantle North Mole - TK * 1, 28/4/91, Woodman Point - EW
Jaeger sp. - all dark bird, approximately size of Silver Gull, with moderately long tail ending in short rounded knob, 28/4/91, Woodman Point - EW
Arctic Jaeger - 10-15, 1/4/91, Fremantle North Mole - TK
Silver Gull - 5,000+, 5/2/91, Langley Park - FO
Black-headed gull sp. - possibly a Franklin's Gull, 25/4/91, Albany Jetty - DW
Franklin's Gull - 1, 24-26/4/91, Eagle Bay, Dunsborough - BS, IS
White-winged Tern - 1 in full breeding plumage, 29/4-4/5/91, Lake Monger - SF et al
Gull-billed Tern - 10 (5 immature), 20/1/91, Mount Many Peaks - RGa
Caspian Tern - 60, 6/4/91, Peel Inlet : record number for south-west - RV, DWa, DA
Roseate Tern - 8, 3/5/91, East Breakwater, Mandurah - SF, AF
Rainbow Lorikeet - 2, 27/2/91, Lake Joondalup South - CW, GL * 2, 18/3/91, Padbury - RSh
Regent Parrot - Pair nesting, 8/11/90, Grassmere - RGa * 10, 24/4/91, Regans Ford - CW et al
Rock Parrot - 55, 2/3/91, Parry Beach near Denmark - AJ, RJ
Pallid Cuckoo - 1 immature, 10/4/91, Lake Claremont - MCr
Fan-tailed Cuckoo - 1, 7/3/91, Wannamal - BBu
Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo - 1, 13/3/91, Wannamal - BBu
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo - 1, 6/3/91, Wannamal - BBu
Fork-tailed Swift - 30, 21/4/91, Amarillo Pool - JH * 3, 21/4/91, Beechina nr The Lakes - RS
Red-backed Kingfisher - 1, 12/5/91, Orange Grove - RS
White-backed Swallow - 13, 5/3/91, Craigie - CW
Ground Cuckoo-shrike - 1, 12/4/91, John Forrest National Park - KY
White-winged Triller - 2 females or immatures, 17/3/91, Lake Monger - BS, IS
Jacky Winter - Juvenile, 10/2/91, Pelican Point - DM

UP NORTH

Least Frigatebird - 1, Jan 91, Port Hedland - TK
Black-necked Stork - 2 adult, 2 immature, 21/1/91, De Grey River near road bridge - KC et al
Gallinago Snipe sp. - 4, Jan 91, De Grey River - BB et al * 1, 30/1/91, Hamelin Station - BB, MC
Asian Dowitcher - up to 21, Jan 91, Leslie Salt Works, Port Hedland - TK
Ruff - 1, 23/1/91, Broome Sewage Farm - BW et al
Red-necked Phalarope - 5, Jan 91, Leslie Salt Works, Port Hedland - TK
Yellow Wagtail - 10, 25/1/91, Roebuck Plains, BW et al * 1, Jan 91, Port Hedland - TK * 1, 16/2/91, Carnarvon - GS * 1, 24/2/91, Carnarvon - RH, HH
Black Honeyeater - male, 14/2/91, Onslow - GS
Pied Honeyeater - 3, 14/2/91, Onslow - GS
Gibberbird - several in company with Crimson and Orange Chats, 14-21/1/91, Carnegie Station - JHo

KEY TO OBSERVER CODES

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| AB - Allan Burbidge | JH - Jack Hunt |
| AF - Austin Fincham | JHo- Jim Howell |
| AJ - Allan Jones | JM - Jim Masters |
| BB - Bryan Barrett | JS - Jim Shaw |
| BBu - Bruce Buchanan | KC - Kevin Coate |
| BC - Ben Carr | KJ - Kevin Jordan |
| BP - Bob Prince | KY - Ken Youngson |
| BS - Bev Standring | LR - Len Robinson |
| BW - Brice Wells | MC - Margery Clegg |
| CW - Chris Wilder | MCr - Michael Craig |
| DA - David Andrew | MW - Mark Whackett |
| DM - Dusty Millar | NB - Norah Brockman |
| DW - David Westwood | NG - Norm Godfrey |
| DWa - Doug Watkins | NH - Neil Hamilton |
| EM - Edna Milne | RG - Rick Green |
| EW - Eddy Wajon | RGa- Ray Garstone |
| FO - Frank O'Connor | RH - Roland Hill |
| GL - Graham Little | RJ - Rose Jones |
| GS - Geoff Shannon | RS - Rod Smith |
| HH - Hazel Hill | RSh- Robyn Shaw |
| HM - Harry Merrifield | RV - Rodney Vervest |
| HVW - Hank Van Wees | SF - Sandra Fincham |
| IS - Ian Standring | SG - Sallie Green |
| JD - Jack Donohoe | TK - Tony Kirkby |
| JE - Jack Ewert | |

WATERBIRD STUDIES

ANNUAL WATERFOWL COUNT - March 1991

Thanks are due to all participants in the March 1991 waterfowl count. Your data sheets have been processed and preliminary figures are provided below.

Due to the very dry conditions throughout the study area in March, certain wetlands still holding water supported significant numbers of birds. Nine wetlands held in excess of 10,000 waterfowl, the most notable being Coyreup Lake (east of Katanning) with 20,486 birds, Peel Inlet 17,795 and Dumbleyung Lake (east of Wagin) 13,285.

Comparisons between March 1991 and November 1990 (the previous waterfowl count) show some interesting results. Numbers of Black Swan were very similar and this appears to be an emerging trend in the counts although we are only counting a proportion of the birds in south-western Australia.

Preliminary figures for March 1991
(including previously established March totals)
are presented below

| | MAR 91 | MAR 90 | MAR 89 |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Black Swan | 18,260 | 15,291 | 22,037 |
| Freckled Duck | | 22 | 68 |
| Australian Shelduck | 61,762 | 32,055 | 41,609 |
| Pacific Black Duck | 29,362 | 33,790 | 63,404 |
| Grey Teal | 121,851 | 24,728 | 134,899 |
| Chestnut Teal | 8,693 | 1,591 | 2,533 |
| Australasian Shoveler | 2,366 | 2,055 | 4,712 |
| Pink-eared Duck | 7,122 | 3,325 | 15,320 |
| Hardhead | 851 | 407 | 1,560 |
| Maned Duck | 6,180 | 3,373 | 7,342 |
| Blue-billed Duck | 686 | 736 | 1,305 |
| Musk Duck | 2,906 | 2,452 | 2,352 |
| Eurasian Coot | 44,638 | 21,130 | 50,747 |
| TOTALS | 304,677 | 140,955 | 347,888 |
| Unidentified | 305 | -- | 6,332 |

Only two Freckled Duck were recorded for the period (i.e. 2 in November 1990). We have been recording progressively smaller numbers of Freckled Duck in the study area since the beginning of the waterfowl counts with the highest number occurring in March 1986 (151 birds). Due to their secretive behaviour and the dense paperbark thickets that the Freckled Duck prefers, it is understandable that birds are easily missed during surveys. Consequently, results of the waterfowl counts do not necessarily point towards a decline in their numbers.

Australian Shelduck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal and the Eurasian Coot are again the species counted in highest numbers. Including the count of Black Swan these birds comprise around 90% of the total. Except for Australian Shelduck which are usually located in very large moulting flocks in November (e.g. Lake Preston) there are more birds counted of each species in March than November in most years (March 1990 was an exception). This trend is generally the same for the last count period with the exception of Pacific Black Duck which increased in March 1991 by only 8,000 birds (see Table of November results in WA Bird Notes No 57).

A significant statistic for March 1991 is the total of Chestnut Teal (8,693). The previous highest count of 2,500 was achieved in March 1989. The high count is a result of aerial surveys of south coastal lakes, river pools and estuaries where Chestnut Teal are regularly found. Due to the very dry conditions and presumed contraction of birds to coastal wetlands, Chestnut Teal were seen in large flocks at certain wetlands (e.g. Pallinup River). Observers are confident of identifying both sexes of Chestnut Teal from the aircraft whereas ground counts are taken of coloured males only.

Preliminary figures reveal that all other species showed similar orders of magnitude or similar ratios of change as in previous counts. Data will need to undergo more detailed analysis before firmer conclusions can be drawn.

It should be noted that by process of extrapolation, the final figures will be much higher than those presented here. By counting up additional wetlands in the study area and extrapolating results from our fixed set (with adjustments for certain bias like mass concentrations of birds at certain wetlands), the final figures may be two to four times greater. The method of formula for this extrapolation goes beyond the scope of this article but will be referred to in more detail in the final report.

All in all, the count was extremely successful and I feel certain that more wetlands were covered from the fixed set than in any previous count. Once again, if you have outstanding data - please rush it in!

STOP PRESS---STOP PRESS

CALM to fund two more duck counts

I am delighted to announce that CALM will fund the RAOU for two more counts. These will be in November 1991 and March 1992 with a possibility of March counts resuming afterwards. On behalf of the RAOU I wish to convey our appreciation of CALM support.

BIRDS TO WATCH - Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*

Introduction

This article will be the first in a series aimed at raising awareness of waterbirds that are endangered, threatened or rare in south-western Australia. Volunteers for SCOPEWEST, Annual Waterfowl Counts and any interested readers are requested to gather information on these special birds. It is hoped that our investigations will be the first step towards implementing responsible management strategies for waterbirds that require special attention.

All information gathered will be held in a BIRDS TO WATCH dossier that will be available for interested people to view at the RAOU office. The file already contains historical information, details of recent sightings and available papers/articles published on the Black Bittern. As information is collected and vetted, the dossier will be periodically updated and reviewed for reporting back to participants. Special surveys will be organised for participants to gain first-hand knowledge of the birds we will be studying.

Historical distribution

Early records reveal that the Black Bittern was once widespread in south-western Australia ranging from Hopetoun around the coast to the Gingin district. Inland records show a distribution from Northam southwards to Collie, Bridgetown and the Manjimup district.

Most early records date from a period between 1899 to 1950 and are from locations on the Swan Coastal Plain. The records reveal that the Black Bittern could once be found readily in metropolitan Perth, skulking along the foreshores of the Swan or Canning Rivers. It was known to breed at Herdsman Lake (1920's) and was also recorded at Lake Monger. An early paper cites a breeding record in District 141, an area of 5 miles radius from Cannington Railway Station as recognised by the RAOU's Migration Committee (September 1925). Further south on the Swan Coastal Plain the Black Bittern was recorded along the lower reaches of the Capel and Preston rivers.

Other records reveal that the Black Bittern was fairly common on the Avon River until 1945. The bird has not been recorded there since 1952. A clutch of eggs, delivered to the W.A. Museum in November 1930, came from the Avon River.

Further south, an adult bird was shot on a pool in Bridgetown in June 1931; the last record from this area. Similarly, a specimen taken on the Collie River on April 28, 1937 was the last known record from this location. A breeding record also exists from an unknown swamp near Wilson's Inlet.

Characteristics

The Black Bittern is a solitary bird, being very secretive and partly nocturnal. These characteristics, combined with its preference for dense vegetation, make it a difficult bird to find and this fact probably partly accounts for the paucity of records.

Records of some sightings reveal that when the bird is feeding it should be quite visible, stalking for fish and crustaceans on the margins of river pools or swamps. The bird has been seen feeding in the shadows of trees on water. If disturbed, they generally either fly (silently, but strongly) to neighbouring trees or adopt the 'bittern-posture' with bill skywards. They are also known to creep or skulk off along branches or through vegetation when disturbed.

Confusion with other species is unlikely except perhaps with juvenile plumage of Rufous Night Heron. In both adult and juvenile plumage the Black Bittern is distinguishable by the yellow streaking on the sides of the neck. In flight the Black Bittern appears uniform black or grey-black on the upperparts whereas juvenile Rufous Night Heron is a spotted rufous-brown colour. The neck is retracted in heron-like fashion which is a distinguishing feature also.

Recent sightings and current status

Records after 1950 are scarce and the RAOU is only aware of records from near Lake Joondalup (a pair in two consecutive years), Murray River near Nanga Brook, the

Goodale Sanctuary (Murray Shire), Blackwood River at Sue's Bridge and Boyup Brook and the Donnelly River at One Tree Bridge.

Most records, as with the historical records, are from riverine habitats. The decline of the Black Bittern correlates closely with the degradation of its habitat through land clearance and grazing. Death or removal of sheltering river-side vegetation may have allowed predators like cats and foxes to increase their toll on the Black Bittern. The bird offers little resistance by adopting its freeze posture and would easily be taken by predators. The insidious destruction of aquatic life by salinization may have seriously depleted the food source of the Black Bittern also.

At present, there is no effective management structure in place to ensure that the Black Bittern will not become extinct in south-western Australia. The last record of Black Bittern in the south-west that the RAOU is aware of was in 1986 (Murray River). The RAOU in W.A. hopes to take the first step in identifying areas of importance for the Black Bittern through the BIRDS TO WATCH programme. Our efforts will be invaluable in promoting research into this and other threatened waterbirds and help to push for protection of riverine environments.

What can you do?

Observers could begin by surveying any of the previously known haunts of the Black Bittern. Further details are available in the BIRDS TO WATCH dossier or by contacting Rodney Vervest on 364 6202.

If you have any information on the Black Bittern, please send it to the BIRDS TO WATCH programme at the RAOU office.

Note: This programme has no funding and relies entirely on volunteers.

Rodney Vervest
Waterbirds Officer

OBSERVATORY REPORTS

BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

By the time you read this BBO will be well into its second phase of development with two new wardens bringing fresh enthusiasms, new ideas and ongoing development.

We take great pleasure in introducing WA members to Kira and Stuart Jackson. They come to us from One Tree Island, which is situated near Heron Island on the Great Barrier Reef. They have been caretakers of the Scientific Study Centre there for the past two and a half years. Both have degrees in Science and extensive skills in catering, mechanical maintenance and dealing with the public. They will prove to be great assets to both the RAOU and the BBO.

As we leave after 13 months at Eyre and 38 in Broome, we wish to thank every WA member of the RAOU who have given us great support during our time as wardens. The total number is beyond our ability to mention, so we can mention only those whose contribution goes beyond what could be termed generous, caring or even adequate.

The State Committee has always been supportive and every member rates a big 'thank you'. The office staff, both full-time and volunteer, have always gone out of their way to help us. Thanks also to those who have helped Rod Smith silk screen, sort and package T-shirts and tea towels.

There were members of courses who did extra curricular tasks and made life more comfortable by doing so. To those amazing people who volunteered to make their way to

Broome and work under often difficult circumstances for a bit of Gail's cooking and the opportunity to look at a few birds we are very grateful. There were so many others, but a general 'thank you' while inadequate does release us from the fear of naming names and missing out some worthy helper to our embarrassment.

We continue to see interesting birds. Since the last WABN we have added Magpie Goose, Little Button Quail, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin and Painted Firetail to the birdlist. Ann Cuthbert found a dead adult Oriental Cuckoo on her verandah in March. This adds to the one we saw at the Observatory in February, 1990. Ali Pentelow picked up a dead Shining Bronze-Cuckoo on her verandah early in April - a very uncommon bird in the Kimberley.

G. and B. Wells

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

During the last three months there have been some unusual sightings. Six Emu were seen swimming in the sea one morning, Australian Raven were eating very soft-shelled sand crabs they dug out with their beaks and we saw an Australian Bustard wading along the beach. The variety of ducks sighted is increasing. Besides Grey Teal, two Pink-eared Duck were seen in January and a group of fifty Pacific Black Duck were seen in March. Seventeen Little Shearwater were sighted on 31st January.

Beach-washed birds have also been interesting. Positive identification of a Gould's Petrel, a fine specimen collected on 10.12.90, has been received from the WA Museum. Since then we have collected a Wandering Albatross, a Wilson's Storm Petrel and a Light-mantled Sooty Albatross.

Around the Observatory birdbaths the usual species of honeyeaters have been gathering, whilst away from the Observatory, large flocks of White-fronted and Yellow-plumed Honeyeater have been sighted. Richard's Pipit have returned to the beach together with flocks of White-fronted Chat. Four Orange Chat were sighted in February.

It was pleasing to see the return of Regent Parrot, increasing numbers of Rock Parrot and Purple-crowned Lorikeet close to the Observatory. At last we have seen the Varied Sittella within the Nuytsland Reserve. They are to be found in the trees at the base of the escarpment. Hopefully, by the time we send in our next report, we will have found a Redthroat and a Shy Hylacola!

G. and G. Goodreid

NEST LONGEVITY

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

It is well known that some species of birds re-use their nests year after year - the Wedge-tailed Eagle being a prominent example. Many more species however build a new nest each year, some a new nest if more than one brood is raised in the year. This being so, it might be expected that favourable nesting sites would be full of nests. Clearly this is not the case, as nests no longer used collapse into fragments under the stress of weather or are in some instances wholly or partly dismantled by later breeders in a quest for nest material.

Nevertheless, nests do remain and on occasion for many years. The larger stick nests seem to withstand weathering better than the smaller nests of the passerines, particularly those bound together with spider web - or is this because the large stick nests are the more obvious? Near my home is a stick nest used by Brown Goshawk to raise a brood of three in 1985 (in a *Eucalyptus calophylla*, Marri or Red Gum). The

nest has not been used since unfortunately but remains in position still. In other Marri trees nearby are three other stick nests all unused since at least 1984 and all apparently from the ground view in reasonable condition. One similar nest in a tall *Eucalyptus rudis* (Flooded Gum) vanished during winter 1990 having withstood the elements since 1984 or before.

I should be interested to hear of the experience of others. There appears to be no readily available reference to nest longevity and every contribution will be an addition to knowledge.

1. Please let me know:-
Length of time a nest has remained recognisably so since last being used;
Type of nest e.g. large stick: bowl or cup of twigs: mud (swallow, martin);
 2. Species of bird making the nest if known;
Species of tree or shrub in which nest is made - if known - I am aware that tree recognition makes bird recognition seem easy.
- Results will be published in future WABN with acknowledgement.

B. Buchanan

NOTICES

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Please note that, since it falls during the Albany campout directly after the Congress, there will be NO monthly meeting on Monday 23rd September.

HANZAB or farewell Sacred Ibis

In an article headed Book News in WABN No 57 March 1991 I drew attention to a changed taxonomic order and different scientific nomenclature of the birds dealt with in Volume One of the HANZAB (*Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*, Marchant S & Higgins P J, 1990 RAOU, Oxford University Press, Melbourne).

Correspondence with RAOU Melbourne since this time reveals that the RAOU has adopted the changes contained in HANZAB and that the changes and any others forthcoming, are to be issued in a new RAOU checklist in the future.

So, farewell Sacred Ibis: future bird lists must refer to Australian White Ibis.

Editor.

BIRDS AND TERMITES

Please see the letter printed below. If you can help with a survey, please use the headings of the questionnaire and respond direct to Dr Traun.

Termites are an important source of food for many Australian animals, yet with the exception of data on some mammals (e.g. echidnas, numbats) and reptiles (e.g. some arid-zone lizards), published information does not reflect this fact. I have started to prepare a manuscript that provides an overview of termite predation in Australia, examining all major taxonomic groups: mammals, reptiles, birds, amphibians (e.g. frogs) and invertebrates (e.g. ants, beetles, scorpions, spiders). The emphasis will be on (a) documenting the diversity of animals eating termites, (b) what parts of the termite population are attacked by predators, and (c) if possible, quantifying termite consumption. In addition to published data, as well as my own observations, I had hoped that experienced field workers/researchers, like yourselves, will let me have the benefit of their personal observations. It goes without saying that any contribution would, of course, be ac-

knowledge in the paper. Should you decide to help out, the following information would be very helpful:

- i. Name of the predator
- ii. Name of termite prey, if known (e.g. *Mastotermes darwiniensis*)
- iii. Where, geographically, were termites taken (e.g. W.A. wheatbelt)?
- iv. What time of year was the observation made?
- v. From what foraging substrate were termites taken? E.g. from the soil surface (surface-foraging termites), from the soil (via digging, arboreal), from the air (alates/reproductives) from a mound or timber.
- vi. How important are termites to the overall diet of the predator (if known)?
- vii. What approximate quantities were taken (a few; tens, hundreds)?
- viii. How confident are you in the accuracy of your observations (e.g. identifying flying alates as termites rather than ants)?
- ix. Any other information you consider of relevance.

Please return the questionnaire regardless of your response to:

Dr. Max Abensperg-Trauer
CSIRO - Division of Wildlife & Ecology
LMB No. 4, Midland, WA 6056
Ph: (09)2520111(W) - 3821446(H)

BBCBQ

Most bird observers are familiar with Grey Teal. How well do you really know this duck?

1. Do Grey Teal moult annually?
2. What type of nest site is most often used by Grey Teal?
3. Is their breeding best described as opportunistic or seasonal?
4. How many days before flight is usually possible after hatching?
5. Do Grey Teal allopreen?
6. After moulting, for how long are they flightless?
7. Do Chestnut and Grey Teal mate with resultant Chestnut-Grey hybrids?
8. Do Grey Teal from the Eastern States reach WA?
9. During the breeding season male Grey Teal may perform synchronic swimming which is accompanied by what specific eye movement?
10. Is the well known "laugh" or "chuckle" of the female Grey Teal individually distinctive or are the calls all very similar?

MEMBERS CONTRIBUTIONS

SPLENDID FAIRY-WREN

On Saturday 26th January, my wife told me of some birds she had seen in our back garden whilst I was absent from the house. She identified them as Splendid Fairy-wren.

The following day the birds reappeared. There was a male in full plumage, and what appeared to be two female and three immature birds. The wrens spent the next ninety minutes either in a bottlebrush or two wattle trees close to the back fence, or hopping around on the lawn. The birds then briefly went into the next door neighbours garden for about five minutes, returned to my back garden for a further twenty minutes, then flew off towards bushland over the road from where I live.

On the evenings since then, when we have arrived home before dark, the wrens have appeared for various periods of time.

Today (Saturday 2nd February) I spent the day at home watching the wrens. They spent most of the day in the back garden, at times coming into the patio area. One female inspected me from the other side of the flywire door, at a distance of about 60cm. Although I observed both females feeding the younger birds, I did not see the male bird doing so.

Our garden is an average 1/5 acre block, totally fenced in. The house is about 400 metres from the edge of Lake Joondalup North, an extension to its surrounding bush ending over the road to the house. The back area is mainly lawn, with native trees and shrubs around the fences, a small vegetable patch and large patio area.

It seems an unusual place for a family of Splendid Fairy-wren to be spending so much time.

J.G. Little

LAKE VIOLET

WA Bird Notes number 56 of December 1990 carried a short account of a visit I made to Lake Violet in October 1990. Storr (1985) in notes on the waders at the Lake refers to Red-necked Stint as a "rare passage migrant" and to Sharp-tailed Sandpiper as a "visitor or passage migrant" (both p17). My observations, together with those of G & P Agar, in the same issue of WABN, led me to the view that Lake Violet was probably more regularly used by migratory waders than Storr (1985) appears to suggest. Consequently I determined to revisit the Lake during the season waders return to their breeding grounds in the hope that I would observe such numbers or species as would support my hypothesis.

I decided to visit in March 1991 but as the heat in the South-West during that month was generally extreme I delayed travel until April, arriving at the Lake on April 9. By comparison with the October previous, the Lake was reduced to its main basin and was much smaller in size though it would still have to be described as large by the standard of many lakes in the South-West. The depth appeared low across the entire Lake area, Australian Shelduck being able to stand with their bellies clear of the water in all but small areas where the main feeder creek flows into the Lake. The Australian Shelduck were dabbling in these deeper areas, tails up. The now extensive Lake margins contained numbers of dead Australian Shelduck, over thirty were counted, as well as one dead Black Swan. The reason for the deaths was not clear.

On arrival the most obvious birds were the Australian Shelduck which totalled some 445 (some 600+ in October). The number present changed more or less continually during the late afternoon and evening as well as in the early morning for parties of Australian Shelduck, from one to thirty, flew both from and back to the Lake. The sole Black Swan present appeared to leave during the night, for one was seen flying in during the sunrise, to be the sole Black Swan present for the day. It seems likely the birds were flying to the nearby Emu Farm, where, I was informed, grain could be readily found. I did not visit the Farm to check on this.

The next greatest number of waterbirds was Grey Teal with 320 (500+ October). They had 5 Hardhead with them on the afternoon of arrival, a number which had dropped to one the following morning. Given the shallowness of the water I was surprised to see any (15 in October). Eurasian Coot, the greatest in number in October with 1200+ were reduced to two. Also with these birds was one male Australasian Shoveler.

There were three Banded Stilt and one Black-winged Stilt. Red-capped Plovers totalled 145, about the same as were seen previously, while Red-necked Stint, two seen by the Agar's,

