

# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

Australia Post Publication No WBH 1453

No 60 December 1991

## Australian 1st : Black-headed Gull in Broome

On Saturday 19th October 1991 a local birder, Brian Kane, rang the Broome Bird Observatory to report a dark headed gull at the Broome sewerage ponds. Later the same day, Bruce Ferry, (Assistant Warden BBO) with two others observed the bird from between 50m and 20m for a period of 40 minutes before it was disturbed and left the area. The conclusion was that it might be a Laughing Gull, but that there were a number of details that did not seem to fit, such as the head colour and wing markings.

The bird was seen by local birders on the Sunday. Bruce Ferry and I again saw the bird on Monday. We stayed for two hours, observing from within 15m at times, although I was distracted for about 30 minutes looking at Yellow Wagtails etc. I spent most of the time updating the notes I had made on Saturday and looking for possible Black-headed Gull features such as no windows in the primaries, as we knew the bird was not a Laughing Gull and could be a Black-headed Gull.

On Tuesday, Stuart Jackson (Warden BBO) phoned RAOU HQ in Melbourne and asked for details of any relevant gulls to be faxed. The bird was seen on Wednesday and on Thursday when Stuart Jackson visited the sewerage ponds at about 7:30 am and then picked up a fax from Melbourne. This meant the details of the bird could be confirmed. The white wedge and leading edge on the top of the wing and the dark patch under the primaries were again noted. The bird was a Black-headed Gull.

The most obvious aspect of the bird's behaviour was that it rarely stayed still. On the water, it continually swam back and forth feeding. On the bank, it preened. The preening of its wings and body was mostly with its bill, although on one occasion it scratched its head with its right foot.

The gull swam with its head held high, frequently dipping its bill, presumably to catch small prey near or just below the surface of the water. There were no noticeable mannerisms that indicated if the gull was successful or not. The gull swam laps near one side of the

pond of no particular preferred length (1m to 20m was observed) and reversed direction at no particular place or for any discernible reason. Laps were shorter when we were closer. The gull made none or several dips on each lap.

With caution, the bird could be approached comparatively closely (between 10m and 15m), especially when it was on the water. It did not appear to be disturbed when several Pacific Black Duck and Grey Teal took off close by during our initial approach.

The Silver Gulls seldom came within a metre of the Black-headed Gull when it was swimming. On the Thursday as we initially approached, a Silver Gull came within half a metre (or vice versa) near a corner of the pond. Both gulls called and the Black-headed Gull appeared to peck in the direction of the Silver Gull. After about 10 or 15 seconds the Silver Gull moved away. The Black-headed Gull appeared to be dominant.

On the bank there appeared to be no interaction between the two species, even though on the Saturday two Silver Gull were standing within half a metre of the Black-headed Gull, allowing us a very good comparison of size and colour.

Size: When the bird was on the bank, it was the same size as the Silver Gull that were close to it, or very slightly smaller, if there was any difference. However, when swimming the Black-headed Gull appeared slightly but noticeably larger than Silver Gull, but this may have been because of its upright posture.

Head: The head was a dark chocolate brown colour mostly, although the forehead and down to the bill was lighter. The line of the edge of the hood was distinct and from the rear it was level with the eyes. From the side, the line was slightly more vertical than diagonal and from the front, it could be clearly seen below the throat. From behind when swimming, the neck appeared much thinner than the head, probably because of an upright posture.

Eye-ring: The bird had a pale yellow or cream coloured eye-ring, although the front half (or part of it)

was often not apparent. The eye was dark.

**Bill:** The bill was a very deep red colour and was similar in shape and size to that of the Silver Gull. There was no significant difference in the colour of the tip of the bill.

**Legs:** The legs were also a deep red colour, very similar to the darkest leg colour of the Silver Gull and of similar length. The legs did not quite extend to the end of the tail in flight.

**Wings in flight:** There was a thin black band on the trailing edge of the outer primaries and a bright white wedge on the leading edge of the primaries joining (but not as wide as) the black band. The white continued along the leading edge of the full wing. The remainder of the top of the wing was silver grey. There was a dark patch and smudges underneath the primaries. The remainder of the underneath was whitish.

**Wings not in flight:** The wings were slightly but noticeably greyer than those of the Silver Gull. There was no hint of any brown. The primaries had black tips without windows, unlike the Silver Gull. The wings crossed in a deep V when the bird was swimming. The bottom of the wing was sometimes partly tucked into the body feathers when the bird was on the bank.

**Body:** The back of the head, the front and the

belly were a clean white. The colour of the back in flight was silver grey, or white.

**Tail:** The tail was a clean white above and below in flight. It was very slightly rounded, occasionally fanned wider. The underneath of the tail appeared discoloured when the bird was swimming due to the reflection of the colour of the sewerage pond water.

**Call:** The call was very similar to that of the Silver Gull, although it could be distinguished when both called together when it seemed to have a slightly higher tone. The Black-headed Gull called once while it was preening, a couple of times as it took off and a few times when Silver Gull were too close when it was swimming.

**Gape:** The inside of the mouth was a bright red when it opened its bill to call.

The breeding distribution of the Black-headed Gull is from central and southern Europe (including the UK) through to central continental Asia but not including Japan. In the non-breeding season the normal range extends southward to include parts of Africa, India, the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra (but not Java, Borneo or the Philippines) and Japan. It is somewhat surprising the Black-headed Gull has not been sighted in Australia before.

F. O'Connor

## Rural Roadside Bird Counts— Summer 1990 / 1991

During the spring and summer of 1990-91 large numbers of Australian Plague Locusts (*Chortoicetes terminifera*) moved through the farming areas of Western Australia, threatening damage to crops and gardens. The Agriculture Protection Board planned and executed a spraying campaign to destroy major concentrations and many farmers destroyed small pockets by spraying with their own equipment. It seemed to us to be worth attempting to document the effect of such spraying on farmland birds.

Accordingly three roadside routes were selected and surveys conducted along them during the months when locusts were most active, September 1990 to January 1991. One route (named Beverley) was on the Talbot West Road from the divide between the Helena and the Dale Rivers, to Beverley, south along the Great Southern Highway to Mt. Kokeby, then west along the Dale-Kokeby Road to Carrs Road, about three km west of Mt Kokeby. It was almost all in farming country, except for the first kilometre of partly cleared land and was 57 km long. The second was 44 km long, named Dumbleyung and starting there, then north along the Mount Pleasant Road to the One Fourteen Road, east to Tincurrin Road, south to White Well Road, east to Wishbone Road, south to One Twenty Five Road, south west to One Twenty Nine Road and then west back to Dumbleyung. The third (Moulyinning) followed the rabbit fence north from its intersection with One Twenty Five Road to North Boundary (of Dumbleyung Shire) Road, east to Springhurst Road, south west to Moulyinning North Road. It followed this road into Moulyinning South Road, turning east to meet and follow Carwardine Road south to One Twenty Five Road and so back to the rabbit fence. It was 90 km long.

The Beverley route was counted on October 20, 27, 31, November 7 and December 11. The Dumbleyung route on September 23 and January 27 and the Moulyinning route on

October 2 and January 27. No spraying was done in the Dumbleyung and Moulyinning areas. When counting, vehicles were driven at 40 km/hour and birds seen while moving were counted. If stops were made for identification no additional birds were counted until the vehicle was moving again. A single driver/observer operated the Beverley route but two people were involved on the Dumbleyung and Moulyinning routes.

The results are set out below. It is apparent that more birds were counted on the Dumbleyung (4.205 birds/km) and Moulyinning (2.871 birds/km) routes than on the Beverley (0.610 birds/km) route. We think this to be simply the effect of having a full time observer as well as a driver on the southern routes rather than a real difference between the areas. On all three routes more birds were counted in the later counts than on the early ones.

Inspection of the results from the Beverley route shows this to be mainly due to an increase in the number of Australian Ravens, from 4 on October 20 to 21 on December 11. The birds were feeding on locusts on the road. Two other changes show up in the Beverley counts; Richard's Pipit had a maximum count on October 31 and woodswallows decreased in numbers from 7 on October 20 to 0 on December 11. In both these cases the numbers involved are small.

In the Dumbleyung count many more birds were counted on January 27 than on September 23, 264 compared with 106. Most of this is accounted for by an increase in the numbers of Richard's Pipit (23 to 103) and White-fronted Chat (5 to 26).

On the Moulyinning route a substantial increase in numbers of birds also occurred between October 2 and January 27 (198 to 336). Again some of this was due to species counted only on the second count, the Yellow-throated Miner (28) and the Australian Raven (36). Eliminating these leaves a difference

of 74. Three species increased noticeably; Richard's Pipit from 36 to 75, Willie Wagtail from 20 to 46 and Australian Kestrel from 1 to 7.

The species that showed increases between spring and summer are known to make movements. We think it likely that they increased in these counts because they moved to take advantage of the numbers of locusts (including those killed on the roads) available along the routes we counted. Richard's Pipit increased along all routes; the Australian Raven increased quantitatively on the Beverley route and a subjective opinion was that it had also increased on the southern routes. The Willie Wagtail was unchanged on the Dumbleyung route, increased on the Moulyinning route and showed a slight increase on the

Beverley route on October 31 (as did Richard's Pipit), at Talbot Road. The White-fronted Chat increased on the Dumbleyung route but not on the Moulyinning route. It was not seen on the Beverley route. The Australian Kestrel increased on the Moulyinning route: it is known to feed on insects.

It appears that spraying cannot be said to have reduced the numbers of birds on the routes surveyed, although it is known that some birds died in Beverley town at the time spraying was taking place. In the countryside the birds seem to have taken advantage of the abundant insect food provided by the locust plagues. Counts obtained in non-plague years will be interesting to compare with these figures.

S. Davies, T. & D. Lloyd

| Species                   | <b>BEVERLEY</b> |           |           |           |           | Total      | Birds/kms   |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
|                           | Oct 20          | Oct 27    | Oct 31    | Nov 7     | Dec 11    |            |             |
| White-faced Heron         | 1               | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2          | .007        |
| Brown Falcon              | 0               | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1          | .003        |
| Laughing Kookaburra       | 1               | 1         | 2         | 0         | 0         | 4          | .014        |
| Rainbow Bee-eater         | 0               | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 1          | .003        |
| martin / swallow          | 0               | 0         | 0         | 0         | 2         | 2          | .006        |
| Richard's Pipit           | 1               | 4         | 10        | 2         | 6         | 23         | .079        |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike | 0               | 0         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 2          | .006        |
| Willie Wagtail            | 3               | 4         | 7         | 1         | 3         | 18         | .062        |
| woodswallow               | 7               | 4         | 2         | 4         | 0         | 15         | .052        |
| Australian Magpie-lark    | 3               | 1         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 5          | .017        |
| Pied Butcherbird          | 0               | 0         | 0         | 1         | 0         | 1          | .003        |
| Australian Magpie         | 8               | 5         | 8         | 11        | 9         | 41         | .141-       |
| Australian Raven          | 4               | 10        | 9         | 16        | 21        | 60         | .207        |
| <b>Totals</b>             | <b>28</b>       | <b>32</b> | <b>38</b> | <b>37</b> | <b>42</b> | <b>177</b> | <b>.610</b> |

| Species                   | <b>DUMBLEYUNG</b> |            |            |              | <b>MOULYINNING</b> |            |            |              |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------------|------------|------------|--------------|
|                           | Sep 23            | Jan 27     | Total      | Birds/kms    | Oct 2              | Jan 27     | Total      | Birds/kms    |
| White-faced Heron         |                   |            |            |              |                    |            |            |              |
| Australian Kestrel        | 2                 | 0          | 2          | .023         | 1                  | 7          | 8          | .043         |
| Brown Falcon              |                   |            |            |              | 0                  | 1          | 1          | .005         |
| martin / swallow          | 3                 | 0          | 3          | .034         | 6                  | 3          | 9          | .045         |
| Richard's Pipit           | 23                | 103        | 126        | 1.432        | 36                 | 75         | 111        | .597         |
| Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike |                   |            |            |              | 0                  | 1          | 1          | .005         |
| Willie Wagtail            | 18                | 18         | 36         | .409         | 20                 | 46         | 66         | .355         |
| song-lark                 | 0                 | 3          | 3          | .034         |                    |            |            |              |
| Yellow-rumped Miner       |                   |            |            |              |                    | 28         | 28         | .151         |
| White-fronted Chat        | 5                 | 26         | 31         | .352         | 17                 | 13         | 30         | .161         |
| woodswallow               | 15                | 17         | 32         | .364         | 36                 | 42         | 78         | .419         |
| Australian Magpie-lark    | 8                 | 11         | 19         | .216         | 14                 | 21         | 35         | .188         |
| Australian Magpie         | 32                | 28         | 60         | .682         | 68                 | 63         | 131        | .704         |
| Australian Raven          |                   | 58         | 58         | 1.318        |                    | 36         | 36         | .194         |
| <b>Totals</b>             | <b>106</b>        | <b>264</b> | <b>370</b> | <b>4.205</b> | <b>198</b>         | <b>336</b> | <b>534</b> | <b>2.871</b> |

## OBSERVATIONS

Sightings, with numbers, location and relevant notes (particularly for unusual sightings), should be sent to "Observations Officer" at the WA Office.

Some checking of these observations has been made but further scrutiny should be given prior to inclusion in any official or technical report.

### DOWN SOUTH

**Yellow-nosed Albatross** - 3, 18/8/91, Rottneest seabirding trip - GL et al

**Southern Giant-Petrel** - 1 beach-washed, 7/8/91, Halls Head, Mandurah - JH

**Cape Petrel** - 1, 23/7/91, North Mole - MCr \* 2, 3/8/91, Lancelin - JD

**Soft-plumaged Petrel** - 2, 18/8/91, Rottneest seabirding

trip - GL et al

**Blue Petrel** - 1, 4/8/91, North Mole - MCr \* 1 beach-washed, 25/8/91, Trigg Beach - MB

**Prion sp.** - 1 beach-washed, 5/8/91, beach at South Mole, Fremantle - BS, IS. Measurements appeared to fit Slender-billed Prion but R. Johnstone (WA Museum) could not rule out an immature Antarctic Prion.

**Hutton's Shearwater** - several, 18/8/91, Rottneest seabirding trip - GL et al

**Little Shearwater** - 1 beach-washed, Aug 91, Rottneest Island - BB, MC

**Little Egret** - 1, 4/11/91, Alfred Cove - JH

**Little Bittern** - 1, 17/10/91, Lake Joondalup - AB \* 1 heard calling, Nov 91, Nine Mile Lake Nature Reserve (Murray) - RV

**Australasian Bittern** - 2, 3/11/91, Byenup Lagoon (Lake Muir Nature Reserve) - RV \* 1, 3/11/91, Tordit Garrup Lagoon (Lake Muir Nature Reserve) - RV

**Freckled Duck** - 1 with 2 young, (nest found had just hatched), 1/11/91, Chandala Swamp (Mucnea) - RV

**Square-tailed Kite** - 11-13/10/91, Dryandra - MM, PM \* one building nest, Oct 91, Stirling Range Nat. Park - AR

**Peregrine Falcon** - 1, 9/9/91, Toolbrunup Peak, Stirling Range National Park - BS, IS \* 1, 6/10/91, Wongan Hills - BS, IS et al

**Common Pheasant** - 1 male, 26/9/91, Parkerville - BB

**Buff-banded Rail** - up to 5 adult birds including a pair with 2 young, Oct 91, Riverton Bridge - JH

**Bush Thick-knee** - 1 + 2 young, 11-13/10/91, Dryandra - MM, PM

**Ruddy Turnstone** - 6, 4/11/91, Alfred Cove - JH

**Grey-tailed Tattler** - 1, 4/11/91, Alfred Cove - JH

**Terek Sandpiper** - 1, 20/10/91, Quinns Rock - PT \* 3, 4/11/91, Alfred Cove - JH

**Arctic Tern** - 1 non-breeding and 1 breeding plumage, 3/8/91, South Mole, Fremantle - BS, IS

**Gull-billed Tern** - 1, 16/9/91, Mandurah - TJ

**Brush Bronzewing** - 1, 3/9/91, Wilderness Road, Margaret River - IR

**Barking Owl** - 1 calling, 26/9/91, Pinnaroo Valley Memorial Park - RS, JS

**Southern Scrub-robin** - 2+, 6/10/91, Mt Matilda Nature Reserve, Wongan Hills - BS, IS et al

**Western Whipbird** - 1 calling nr. Hassell Beach, 30/9/91 - AR \* 1 heard, mouth Waychincup River, 13/10/91 - AR

**Shy Hylacola** - 2+, 6/10/91, Mt Matilda Nature Reserve, Wongan Hills - BS, IS et al \* 2, 6/10/91, Mt O'Brien, Wongan Hills - BS, IS et al

**Rufous Treecreeper** - 1, July 91, Eric Singleton Bird Sanctuary, Bayswater - ES \* 1, 30/10/91, Kalamunda National Park - CW, BW

**Tawny-crowned Honeyeater** - 1, 27/6/91, grounds of Murdoch University - BN

**Little Woodswallow** - 1, 5/10/91, Mt O'Brien, Wongan Hills - BS, IS et al

**Little Crow** - 1, 11-13/10/91, Dryandra - MM, PM

#### UP NORTH

**Garganey** - 2 very probable, 26/10/91, Parry Lagoons near Wyndham - FO

**Pacific Baza** - 1, 11/10/91, Packsaddle Springs near Kununurra - FO

**Redshank** - 1, 13/10/91, Roebuck Bay near Broome Bird Observatory - FO

**Gallinago Snipe sp.** - 1, 15-16-24/10/91, Broome Sewerage Ponds - FO et al

**Northern Rosella** - 2, 11/10/91, Packsaddle Springs near Kununurra - FO

**Common Koel** - male and female, 26/10/91, Kununurra - FO

**Dollarbird** - 4, 26/10/91, Dunham River near Kununurra - FO

**Yellow Wagtail** - 3, 21/10/91, Broome Sewerage Ponds - FO

**Tawny Grassbird** - 1, 8/10/91, typha reeds near Argyle Diamond mine - FO

#### OBSERVER CODES

AB - Allan Burbidge

AR - Allan Rose

AT - Audrey Turner

BB - Bryan Barrett

BF - Bruce Ferry

BN - Brenda Newbey

BS - Bev Standring

BW - Brian Wilson

CN - Clive Napier

CW - Chris Wilder

ES - Eric Singleton

FO - Frank O'Connor

GL - Graham Little

IR - Ian Rooke

IS - Ian Standring

JD - Jack Donohoe

JH - Jack Hunt

JS - Jim Shaw

LS - Leon Silvester

MB - Mary Bremner

MC - Margery Clegg

MCr - Michael Craig

MM - M. Massam

PM - P. Mawson

PT - Patricia Todd

RS - Robyn Shaw

RV - Rodney Vervest

TJ - Tom Jeffcote

WN - Wendy Napier

## Scopewest

YES, the waterbirds officer is still alive and kicking!

Due to a perplexing array of activities in the run-up to the last issue of WA Bird Notes, I missed the deadline and failed to appear. Apologies to all 'wetfoots' for the delay in reporting.

April, July and October surveys have been completed and data is now being vetted and entered. There is still some data outstanding: please check that you have submitted your records. Remember we require a sheet even if you saw no birds or the wetland was dry.

We have now completed nine survey periods for the Scopewest project. Only the January 92 survey remains before data gathering is complete - how quickly the time seems to have gone! January 92 will have a shorter survey time because the final analysis and writing-up will be under way and a final data set is needed by the end of January 92. I will contact all Scopewest participants during mid-December in preparation for the January survey and to tell you of forthcoming developments.

The October survey revealed a significant waterbird activity on the Swan Coastal Plain. Many of the 255 Scopewest sites had breeding records and some wetlands had very high numbers of birds also. Most notably, the presence of 15 Freckled Duck across the study area was pleasing, particularly as 3 breeding records

were recorded.

\* The opening talk at the recent RAOU Congress concerned Scopewest and I have had some keen interest shown in the project since. Some delegates have requested more information about the running of the project and many were impressed by the dedication of you the people who collect the data.

\* The project recently featured in the RAOU section of GEO giving the project even wider recognition.

\* As writing-up of Scopewest will commence shortly, my office will be (part-time) at the CALM office, Woodvale. To contact me after November 1991, please call 09 405 5100 or the RAOU Office).

### Birds to watch

I was very encouraged by the response to the Black Bittern article and will follow up with others in forthcoming issues of WA Bird Notes. Unfortunately due to a host of project commitments and other work I have been unable to feature another bird for this section so far.

Two records resulted from the article. One of an adult bird roosting in Flooded Gum at the previously known site at One Tree Bridge (Donnelly River) and similarly, a record from the Joondalup Lake area, also a previous haunt of Black Bittern. A new locality near Normans Inlet (Two Peoples Bay) was revealed to the RAOU (a bird in November 1980) and also a record near Northcliffe (April 1976).

I am particularly grateful to Jim Masters for sharing his knowledge of this species and to all the others who rang the office or wrote to me on these birds.

Thank you and keep a look out for Black Bittern!

R. Vervest

## Silvereye movements in the South-West

Early in September I climbed Bluff Knoll. At the summit I saw a young man observing White-browed Scrubwren in the stunted vegetation. Because I too have more than a passing interest in scrubwrens (and as I needed a rest after my climb) I sat on a rock and talked to the observer. He was an ABC participant from Esperance.

Several days later I met many more cabbies (Counters of Australian Birds) at the Perth RAOU Congress. More were encountered during the Campout which followed. There are 98 people/groups counting regularly from 146 sites in WA. Most send in counts every month, some less frequently and a handful are counting birds fortnightly or weekly. Two, Margaret and Stan Telford count birds in the same area on a daily basis, except when on holiday!

All these contributions comprise a data bank which can be used to document the seasonal movements

of bush birds as well as the seasonal and long term changes in distribution and abundance. However it is still extremely important to have both a good distribution of cabbies as well as numbers. Consequently I am making a special plea for greater active participation in the ABC by WA Group members.

Silvereye have been counted in 47 locations in the South-west (fig A). Most of these sites are in the Wheatbelt (particularly important as information on birds in remnant vegetation areas). Sites where Silvereye were present in winter but not summer (fig B) and sites where there has been 1.5 times or more increase in the relative abundance (birds/30 mins/5 ha) of Silvereye in winter (fig C) appear to be in the northern and southern extremities of the Wheatbelt. In summer Silvereye are in more coastal sites (fig D) and in general are more abundant in the northern Wheatbelt (fig E).

These trends suggest some Silvereye over-winter in the inland and move to the coast in summer. Some may also move south to coastal sites. However the close proximity of some sites where there is an increase in the relative Silvereye abundance in both summer and winter suggests there are also short range or localised movements of Silvereye in these Wheatbelt areas.

These results support the findings of banding studies. Dick and Molly Brown have recorded banded Silvereye moving between Manjimup and Margaret River. Perry de Rebeira has record of banded Silvereye moving from Yanchep to Augusta. These observations, with other known movements of Silvereye near the coast suggest a seasonal north-south migration. At the same

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
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| Chairman        | B. Wilson, 46 Farrant Street<br>Gooseberry Hill 6076 |
| Editor          | B. Buchanan, PO Box 10<br>Wannamal 6505              |

### Notes For Contributors

The Editor requests contributors to note :-

- \*material concerning WA birds may be published
- \*sightings in respect of non - WA birds will not normally be published
- \*contributions should be written or typed with Double Spacing
- \*WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- \*copy will be edited where appropriate
- \*contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary

**Deadline for the March Issue  
28th January 1992**

time these banding studies have also shown some South-west Silvereye are sedentary or only locally nomadic.

We will only know certainly of these matters if we have more cabbies in the area. Southern locations — Bunbury, Yallingup, Augusta, Point D'Entrecasteaux, Walpole, Bremer Bay and Hopetoun would be ideal sites for ABC counts if we are to determine the nature of Silvereye movements to and from and along the coast. Cabbies are counting in coastal sites like Busselton, Margaret River, Albany and Esperance but the picture will only become clearer if there are observations at the sites/areas requiring them. Can you help? The Central Wheatbelt also requires observers and I should like to have sites established at Narrogin, Wagin, Lake Grace, Hyden, Merredin and Wongan Hills.

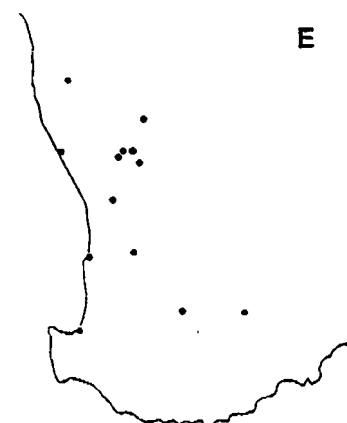
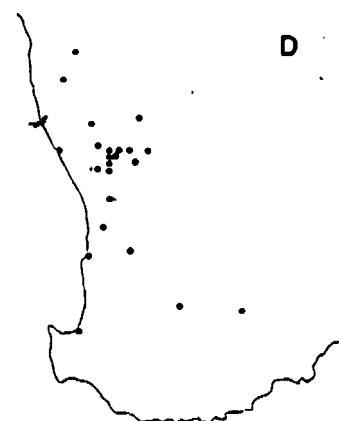
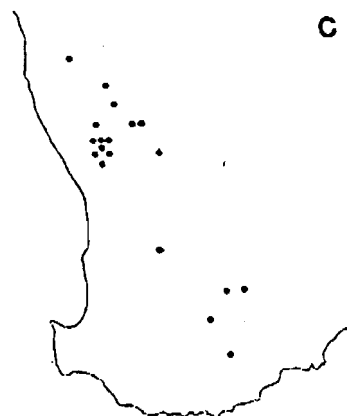
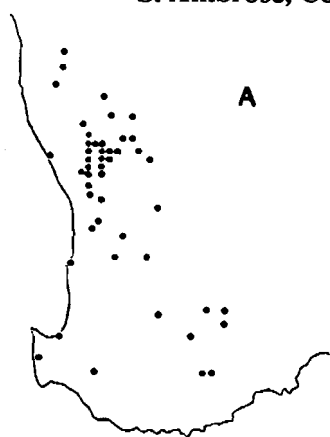
CALM and APB studies have found Silvereye moving seasonally in and out of the tall forests of the South-west. The ABC has not detected this movement because of a lack of participants in the region. ABC counts are greatly required in the Pemberton, Manjimup, Nannup, Jarrahwood, Collie, Dwellingup and Jarrahdale areas.

Counting sites in heathland and wetland vegetation sites also need to be set up across Australia. Those WA Group members who census waterbirds for Scopewest could make a valuable contribution by counting the bushbirds in the vegetation (melaleuca or reeds) bordering their wetland.

Please contact me to receive a participation kit at the RAOU Sydney Office, c/o Australian Museum, PO Box A285, Sydney South, NSW 2000 (tel. 02-339183).

All are most welcome to call to say "hello" whenever you are in Sydney. Our office, together with the other office's of the RAOU is always open to members.

S. Ambrose, Co-ordinator ABC



- Fig 1A - all sites where Silvereye were counted
- Fig 1B - winter sites where Silvereye not seen in summer
- Fig 1C - sites where relative abundance of Silvereye increased x2 or more in winter cf summer
- Fig 1D - summer sites where Silvereye not seen in winter
- Fig 1E - sites where relative abundance of Silvereye increased x2 or more in summer cf winter

# Members Contributions

## FEEDING BY WESTERN WHIPBIRD

The unusual call of the Western Whipbird drew me to a patch of mallee scrub within the Stirling Range National Park, on Sunday August 11, 1991. The mallee scrub is of medium density to 1.5 metres dominated by *Melaleuca pungens* and *Lambertia inermis*, taller shrubs to 3 metres are sparse and consist of *Eucalyptus tetragona*, *Banksia attenuata* and a few clumps of an unknown mallee species.

A single Western Whipbird was seen calling and chattering as it fed only 5 metres from me. Feeding was by turning leaf litter over with its bill. Not once did I see the bird use its feet to move litter for feeding purposes.

The distant call of another Western Whipbird was heard. As it approached, both birds chattered and called to each other before coming together in a relatively open patch where they both fed on the ground by turning litter over with their bills.

Both birds continued to feed, with one bird climbing two metres to the top of a *Lambertia inermis* to feed on the spherical remains of a spider or caterpillar nest covered in leaves of the same plant.

A Southern Scrub-robin moved into the same area only three metres in front of me. A Western Whipbird feeding nearby moved towards the Southern Scrub-robin. The birds came to within one metre of each other before the Southern Scrub-robin moved away, but stayed in the area, showing more interest in me than the other near-ground dwelling bird species possibly competing locally for the same food. It seemed that the Southern Scrub-robin and the Western Whipbird tolerated each other.

Both Western Whipbird chattered and called from time to time while feeding. One called from a sparse *Eucalyptus tetragona* branch two metres above the ground, at this height very open and well above the moderately vegetated lower scrub.

Another bird that uses its bill to turn leaf litter in a similar fashion is the Noisy Scrub-bird, which I have witnessed feeding on a controlled diet during the translocation project at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve.

A. Rose

## PARASITIC POSER

From time to time during bird surveys I labour under the extra weight of camera gear. On most occasions the camera lies undisturbed during its free ride. Rather than photographs I get aches.

However my optimism prevailed once more at the beginning of October when the day was cool, the vegetation colourful and my camera beckoning. Shining Bronze-Cuckoo were calling and a fledgling soon attracted my attention with its unusual call. It had an insect-like quality, more like a cicada than a bird. It squeaked constantly at a rate of more than one a second, both in flight and at rest with hardly a break, in quite a gentle tone.

Out came the camera. The cuckoo was not so stupid as to allow a close shot but I persisted. Eventually it posed in the sunlight and I approached from behind a fairly large trunk so that the distance was minimal. Pose acceptable.. light correct.. focus.. ! With no warning an Inland Thornbill appeared in the viewfinder and thrust its head into the cuckoo's open mouth! Click!

It may be a great photo, or not, but there was delight in having a bird unexpectedly posing for an impatient photographer!

R. Smith

## LAKE JOONDALUP, SOUTH END

Since 1983 we have surveyed the waterbirds on the southern end of Lake Joondalup, the area south of Ocean Reef Road, forty-six times. It has proved to be an important sanctuary, particularly in late summer and early autumn. Although quite a small area of water, in February 1983 there were 583 waterbirds present. Other high tallies were 500 in March 1987 and February 1988 and 350+ birds in March 1984, March 1985, November 1985 and February 1986. This year, 1991, there were 300 birds in both February and March.

In very dry seasons the water contracts to a pool 200 metres by 100 metres in the south-western corner. It was so in April 1988, when there were 130 birds and again in April 1991 with 169 birds. Only once, in May 1985, has there been no standing water and even then Black-fronted Plover were present around small trickles.

Each year there has been breeding by Blue-billed Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Australasian Shoveler and Great Crested Grebe. Of particular note was the breeding of Freckled Duck in November 1986 and the sighting of Black Bittern with immature young in 1986 and again in 1987.

On the western side of this lake area on higher ground there have been many old grand eucalypts with many dead limbs and nesting holes. Gradually these trees have been and are still being felled to make way for a housing estate and new roads; the most recent road being only 150 metres from the lake edge. On the eastern side of the lake "Yellagonga Park" is being developed and the surrounds and the lake itself are to be "prettied". This will almost certainly be disastrous to a significant feeding ground and sanctuary for waterbirds. As it is, it is likely that fertiliser and pesticide run-off from the housing estate on the higher ground to the west will soon reach the lake and particularly the small area in the south-western corner which is the final refuge when all else is dry.

M. Bremner

## BUSH THICK-KNEE AT DRYANDRA

During the weekend of 18th to 20th October, 1991, I and others stayed at the Lion's camp in Dryandra State Forest. The weather was cold, windy and frequently very wet.

On the night of Friday 18th, a friend and I decided to go spotlighting for birds and animals despite the weather conditions. Shortly after dark we heard the call of a Bush Thick-knee. It sounded close to the chalet we were in, but looking from the verandah into the darkness

revealed nothing. We heard the call several more times before we set out at about 2100 hrs. Once outside we swept the paddock facing the chalets with our torches and almost immediately picked up eye reflections. We approached the area slowly and were delighted to see four Bush Thick-knee, two adult and two small juvenile birds.

As we approached one of the adults called and moved towards some taller grass at the edge of the paddock. The other adult and one of the young started to follow, but the other young bird headed off at about 90 degrees from the others. Both adults called, without apparent effect on their prodigal offspring.

The adults and attendant juvenile reached the tall grass, by which time the other young bird was uttering a series of high pitched single notes. As soon as the juvenile with the parents was safely into the longer grass, one adult bird ran to the other young bird, did a "U" turn around it and led it off to the high grass where the other two birds waited. As soon as the family were re-united they all ran off.

We saw the birds again later that night across the track from the paddock and in the same place again the following night.

It was interesting that the parent birds ensured that the juvenile with them was safe before a "rescue" attempt was made of the other juvenile. It did not appear as though the juveniles could fly, as they were only about half of the size of the parent birds.

I would be interested to hear if anyone else has seen "shepherding" by this bird in similar circumstances.

J.G. Little

## BE A BIRD LISTENER

Watching birds has become more popular, but how many watchers listen to the birdsong? While many recognise Australian Magpie song and kookaburra "laughter" most find it hard to pick out all the performers in a dawn chorus. However with a little effort you will be surprised how quickly you can learn.

Commence by listening to early morning bird calls in your garden. Pick one you cannot identify and repeat it until you memorize it. When you next hear the call try to find the bird that made it. However it is much better is to put a tape recorder in the garden and record at dawn or at other times and then pick out the calls you wish to learn. When you hear these calls again, look for the bird that is calling. You will find this becomes a challenge that is always with you and you will constantly add to your birdsong vocabulary.

Then you can commence a new adventure, the "meanings" of bird calls. Once you recognize calls you can learn their significance if you watch bird behaviour. Is there a raptor overhead or a cat nearby? Is another bird trying to enter the territory? There are many situations that provoke a call and you have a whole new field of bird behavior to explore.

There are now many published recordings of bird calls to help you. Thirty seven of these are listed in "A Guide to Recorded Australian Wildlife Sounds" published by the National Film and Sound Archive and available from your library. There is a book/cassette "What Bird Call Is That?" published by Angus & Robertson that has

two cassettes of the calls and an illustrated booklet of the more common species which is a great help to beginners (considered in WABN No 45 March 1985. Ed). John Hutchinson has published a number of cassettes including "Dawn Chorus", that is both a delight to hear and a real challenge to any who wish to increase their knowledge of our bird calls.

There is a new challenge awaiting you. Why not give it a go?

N. Robinson

## GASCOYNE WINTER BIRDING

Where do the Rainbow Bee-eaters in the South-west go in winter? Some birding guides mention that the Rainbow Bee-eater moves to the north of Australia and to the islands of New Guinea and Indonesia during the winter. However some do not go quite so far as we discovered when birding in Carnarvon and along the Gascoyne River at the end of July. At a large pool in the river at Gascoyne Junction on July 28th Rainbow Bee-eater were in the river gums along the pool. Again at Chinaman's Pool near Carnarvon a week later we saw many Rainbow Bee-eater diving and swooping above the pool and perching in the trees nearby.

Carnarvon also proved to be a good place for studying waders at close quarters. Along the shoreline where a dredge was pumping out mud and sand we had wonderful views of Red Knot in breeding plumage and a fully coloured Curlew Sandpiper - according to an English bird watching friend with us only a sight to be seen near the Arctic Circle. There were large numbers of Bar-tailed Godwit, some Black-tailed Godwit, Grey-tailed Tattler, Whimbrel, Grey Plover and Large Sand Plover. Further out among the mangroves many Great Egret were perched and there were also Osprey and a Brahminy Kite patrolling the shoreline.

Good rains around Carnarvon had resulted in a fine flush of spring growth and the air was loud with the calls of Rufous and Brown Songlark. White-winged Triller were nesting and much to the delight of our visitor from England, south of Shark Bay, Pied Honeyeater were displaying with their typical vertical dives. On the sapphire flats towards the mouth of the Wooramel River we saw Orange and White-fronted Chat. Altogether in the Carnarvon area we recorded 102 species of birds. An exceptional display of wildflowers throughout the shire added to the pleasure of the trip.

W. Napier

(Rainbow Bee-eater "are found throughout the year from the Gascoyne and upper Murchison Rivers (Mileura Station) northwards to the Kimberleys" (Serventy & Whittell 1976 p.313). Curlew Sandpiper in full breeding plumage overwinter in the South-west, also in New Zealand, see Pringle JD (1987) *The Shorebirds of Australia* Angus and Robertson London p 366 Ed.).

## LAKE HURSTVIEW

Water was scarce in the early days of the development of the south Dandaragan area, ( the 60's) so a well was dug at a low point 500 metres West of a rough track which was the main road to Perth. Though the well was used for stock watering, crop was also planted in the winter soggy area. A crop of hay was last garnered from





