

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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No 63 September 1992

Asian Dowitcher seen at Lake McLarty

Lake McClarty continues to be an outstanding place to see interesting waders. An RAOU outing on Saturday 21 March 1992 yielded sightings of Black-tailed Godwit, Pectoral Sandpiper, Long-toed Stint (more than 50), Marsh Sandpiper and most notably, a Little Ringed Plover, seen by Ian Standing, Chris Wilder and Jack Hunt, and an Asian Dowitcher, seen by John and Judy Blyth and Doug Watkins.

The Asian Dowitcher was on the eastern side of the lake, initially with a scattered flock of twelve Black-tailed Godwit. After the godwit had flown, a single, superficially similar, but slightly smaller bird remained behind, about 70 metres from us.

Examination through binoculars showed that this was not a Black-tailed Godwit, having a more streaked and patterned appearance, a much more distinct and arched eyebrow extending to the base of the upper mandible and a heavy, completely straight and all black bill. Bar-tailed Godwit was also eliminated by these last two characters. Closer examination through telescopes (X25 and X40) revealed the characteristic vertical black striping on pale flanks, and blunt, slightly expanded bill tip of an Asian Dowitcher. In flight, the bird showed a pale rump and lower back with some darker longitudinal flecks.

Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitcher, of the American flyway, have not to our knowledge been recorded from Australia and have paler greenish-yellow legs, in comparison with the mid to dark grey legs of the Lake McLarty bird. The American dowitchers also have prominent white trailing edges to the wings, a feature not seen in our bird.

We assume it was a first-year bird, from the pale buff, rather than white, margins of many feathers, especially of the mantle and scapulars.

The bird was an active feeder, moving around more rapidly than the godwit and probing the mud continually

with discrete in and out motions of the bill, which was held forward at an angle of about 75 degrees; that is, not quite vertical. Occasionally the head was completely submerged during the downward thrust of the bill.

Over the last ten years it has become apparent that the Asian Dowitcher is a regular migrant to Australia. Groups of up to 130 birds have been seen regularly at the Leslie saltworks at Port Hedland (Lane 1983 & Watkins 1990.) Smaller numbers have been recorded at Roebuck Bay, and Eighty Mile Beach (Lane 1983 & Jaensch 1989) and at Lake McLeod (Jaensch & Vervest 1990). There is only one previous published record of the species in south western Australia; from Emu Point, Albany (Vervest 1989).

We are not aware of Asian Dowitcher being reported previously as occurring in fresh water wetlands in Australia.

J. Blyth and D. Watkins

REFERENCES

Lane B A (1987) *Shorebirds in Australia* Thomas Nelson Victoria

Jaensch R (1989) The Asian Dowitcher in north western Australia, *Stilt*, 4, 2-4.

Jaensch R P & Vervest R M (1990) Waterbirds at remote wetlands in Western Australia, 1986-1988. Part A: Lake McLeod, Shark Bay, Kamballin floodplain and Parry floodplain, RAOU Report no. 69.

Vervest R (1989) Asian Dowitcher reaches the South-west, *Western Australian Bird Notes*, No. 51, 1-2.

Watkins D (1990) Lesley Salt Project: proposed solar salt development near Port Hedland: submission on consultant environmental review, RAOU unpublished report.

Observations

Observations Criteria: —

Observations will be considered for inclusion if they relate to birds: —

- 1) declared under the WA Wildlife Conservation Act as endangered or in need of special protection, or listed in S. Garnett (ed) (1992) *Threatened and Extinct Birds of Australia* (RAOU Report No 82),
- 2) outside their normal range or normal time of occurrence as known from reliable publications,
- 3) recorded in areas where they are known to be rare or to have declined,
- 4) rarely seen in WA or in that part of WA where the observation was made,
- 5) in unusual numbers compared with RAOU data (eg Scopewest) or published information,
- 6) breeding in an area where breeding of that species was previously unknown, or at an unusual time of year,
- 7) counted in breeding pairs in colonies; particularly seabirds, herons, egrets, spoonbills and ibis.

The dates of arrival or departure of migrants are also of interest.

For records of vagrants or very rare species, it is essential to provide a supporting description. Additional information may be requested.

Note that fitting a criterion does not guarantee inclusion - for example, a record of a single Noisy Scrub-bird at Two Peoples Bay does not warrant inclusion, even though it fits criterion 1. The basis for decisions will include the WA Museum regional lists, the RAOU Atlas and results from RAOU waterbird surveys.

Inclusion of observations will be at the discretion of a panel convened by the Observations Officer. Membership of this panel will be by recommendation of the Research Subcommittee and appointment by the WA Group Committee.

Please note that all Observations must be sent to the Observations Officer at the RAOU HQ WA to be considered for inclusion. Observations should NOT be sent to the Editor, WABN.

SOUTH-WEST (*Shark Bay to Cape Arid*)

- Great-winged Petrel** - 1, beach-washed, Rottnest - RV
- Prion spp** - several, 30/6/92, North Mole - TK
- Red-tailed Tropicbird** - 4, 30/3/92, Sugarloaf Rock - CW, JK (a late date for this species in this area)
- Cattle Egret** - 1, 26/5/92, L. Joondalup North - GL
- Glossy Ibis** - 1, 2/7/92, Big Carine Swamp - HvW
- Marsh Harrier** - 1, 10/6/92, Alfred Cove - JH
- Peregrine Falcon** - 1, 23/4/92, stooping on a flock of Feral Pigeon, Burke Drive, Attadale - PH
- Painted Button-quail** - 1, 19/7/92, Bold Park - J/JB, CW
- Ruddy Turnstone** - 250+, 4/8/92, on several lakes at Rottnest - RV
- Little Ringed Plover** - 1, 2/2/92, L. Kogolup - TK
- Wood Sandpiper** - 58, 26/2/92, Amarillo Pool - TK * 80, 26/2/92, L. McLarty - TK
- Grey-tailed Tattler** - 20, 1/8/92, Rottnest - RV (high number

for this time of year)

- Marsh Sandpiper** - 80, 26/2/92, L. McLarty - TK
- Gallinago sp** - 1, 29/1/92, Grove Farm Reserve, Belmont - TD
- Black-tailed Godwit** - 15 (including one in breeding plumage), 27/3/92, L. McLarty - IS, JH
- Bar-tailed Godwit** - 30, 30/5/92, Safety Bay - RN, PT (high number for this time of year)
- Pectoral Sandpiper** - 1, 20/2/92, L. Kogolup - JH
- Long-toed Stint** - 66, 26/2/92, Amarillo Pool - TK * 25, 26/2/92, L. McLarty - TK
- Sanderling** - 50, 12/7/92 - Ledge Point beach, S of Lancelin - GL
- Ruff** - 2, 26/2/92, L. McLarty - TK
- Silver Gull** - 6500, 9/8/92, Perth Esplanade - RV
- White-winged Tern** - 16 in non-breeding plumage, 26/1/92, Wonnerup Estuary - IS (RAOU excursion)
- Roseate Tern** - 14, 4/6/92, Pt Peron (7 nests with young) - BB
- Little Corella** - 150+, 2/7/92, junction of Swan and Helena Rivers - AJM (high number for this area)
- Rainbow Lorikeet** - 34, 12/4/92, Yokine - IS * 1, 23/4/92, Kelmscott - A/RJ (this species is expanding in range north and south)
- Regent Parrot** - 5, 21/3/92, cnr Nicholson and Forrest Roads, Forrestdale - IS
- Fork-tailed Swift** - 5, 1/4/92, Kallaroo - JP * 6, 2/4/92, Boyagin Nature Reserve - SN, SD, CW * 60, 6/4/92, Carine - JP * 100-200, 26/4/92, Roleystone - J/HS * 1000+, 26/4/92, Canning Valley - M. Green per J/HS
- Western Whipbird** - 3, 14/6/92, Sukey Hill, 3 km E of Cranbrook - RV, BO, DA (western-most record and a range extension from Stirling Range)
- Yellow-plumed Honeyeater** - 1, 21/6/92, Darling Scarp at Kelmscott, & 3, Wright Brook - GM (rare near Perth)
- White-naped Honeyeater** - 50-100, 2/5/92, Dryandra - FO (large number for this species) * 2, 13/7/92, Morley - HvW (scarce on Swan Coastal Plain)

ARID ZONE (*including the Pilbara, Gascoyne, interior and Nullarbor*)

- Herald Petrel** - 1, 31/5/92, Varanus Island - TK (first record for WA)
- Black-breasted Buzzard** - 1, 4/7/92, Rocky Pool, Gascoyne River - DK * 1, 14/7/92, Minilya River crossing - BB, MC * 1, 17/7/92, 10 km N of Gascoyne Junction - BB, MC, DK
- Lesser Golden Plover** - 2, 30/6/92, Port Hedland Racecourse on grassed area - A/RJ
- Ruddy Turnstone** - 290, 30/6/92, Port Hedland Racecourse, feeding on grassed area - A/RJ
- Scarlet-chested Parrot** - 1, 17/6/92, Leinster - GL
- Star Finch** - 4, 15/7/92, Chinaman's Pool (Gascoyne River) and 3, Carnarvon Sewage Works - BB, MC, DK

KIMBERLEY

- Radjah Shelduck** - 10, 11/4/92, near Argyle Diamond Mine - FO
- Brahminy Kite** - 2 (1 adult, 1 immature), 6/6/92, Argyle mine site - FO
- Masked Woodswallow** - 2000+, 11/4/92, between Argyle airport and L. Argyle - FO (large concentration for this species)

Observer Codes are on page 11

Perry House Officially Opened : New HQ for RAOU WA

The official opening of Perry House in Bold Park, the new combined headquarters for the W.A. Group and the Wildflower Society of W.A., was held on June 9th.

The two Committees and many volunteers had worked like beavers in the weeks beforehand, scrubbing, painting, gardening and refitting. This flurry of physical activity was the culmination of many months of searching for a new venue to replace the Canning Bridge office and of negotiations with our new landlord, the Perth City Council.



Part of the Opening Ceremony

Photo: P. Howden

Perry House, basically a Federation style cottage, looked magnificent when cleaned, painted and refurbished in a style to fit its character and decked with immense bunches of Western Australian wildflowers provided by the Wildflower Society.

Fortunately, opening day proved to be fine, despite a rather worrying forecast. A large green and orange awning was set up to accommodate over 70 seated guests and the official party, with special guests being the famous British birdwatcher and comedian Bill Oddie and the Lord Mayor of Perth, Reg Withers.

We were extremely well served by our Master of Ceremonies, well-known broadcaster, John Colwell, who is also a member of the Wildflower Society. John first introduced Don Wignall, acting Chairperson of the Wildflower Society and then John Blyth, Chairperson of the WA group of the RAOU. Their two short speeches complemented each other well, outlining the nature of the two societies, emphasising the significance of Bold Park as an urban conservation reserve and thanking the City of Perth warmly for providing the two societies with such an excellent home base and with the opportunity to be closely involved with the future of Bold Park.

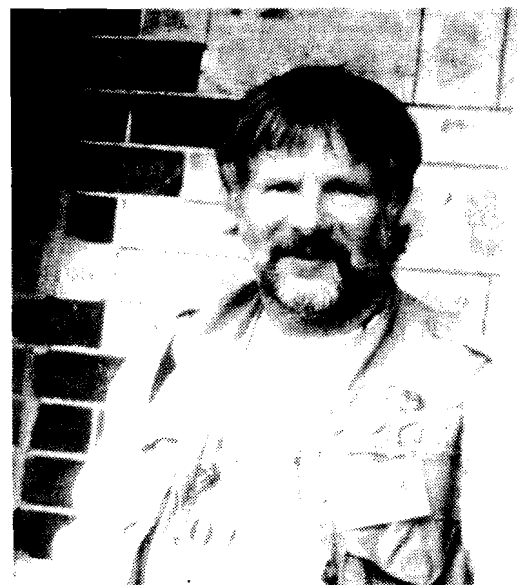
The next speaker was the Lord Mayor of Perth, the Honorable Reg Withers, who provided some of the history of

Perry House. Originally built by a herdsman-made-good, Mr Joseph Perry it has more recently been the residence of the caretaker of Bold Park. The Lord Mayor welcomed the two Societies in their new role as residents of Perry House (although he did seem to have some trouble with the pronunciation of "ornithologists").

Our final speaker, with the task of formally opening the new offices was Bill Oddie, complete with many pocketed, badge-studded jacket and binoculars - the epitome of the optimistic birder! The fact that Bill Oddie's funny side as a professional comedian is deeply interwoven with his dedication to birds and their welfare became evident as he spoke. Bill also noted that throughout his second, hectic trip to Australia, in which he had been steadily interviewed by media from one side of the continent to the other (even by an echidna!), he had noticed that people from Lord Mayors to radio announcers paled when they were faced with the word "ornithologist"-besides which, very few seemed know it's meaning. He suggested that it was high time to replace the mouthful of "Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union" with a simple name in sensible, plain English.

Having got this off his chest, Bill declared Perry House to be open and marked the occasion by ceremonially planting a quandong tree, *Santalum spicatum*, provided by the Wildflower Society. Bill was presented with a packet of quandong seeds by the Wildflower Society as a memento and both he and the Lord Mayor received a pair Banksia candlesticks (made by the RAOU's Clive Napier) as an appreciation of their contribution to the two societies.

Guests at the opening then combined a light lunch of wine, fruit juice and hot nibbly with an inspection of the new premises, including an exhibition of wildlife art. This exhibition, Feathers and Flowers in Film and Paint, mounted in the main hall and the lounge room, really set off the lovely old house and was much appreciated. The RAOU WA Committee



Bill Oddie at the Opening

Photo: P. Howden

is hoping that this use of our premises as a gallery for the exhibition and potential sale of wildlife art can become a permanent feature, with benefits for both artists and the RAOU — so come on all art collectors!

The crowd of supporters from both organisations amounted to almost a hundred, with many RAOU stalwarts, such as Peter and Di Congreve from Beverly coming long distances to help us celebrate our new premises. The atmosphere was a very happy and optimistic one and the many people who had worked hard to prepare for the opening were thanked and congratulated for making the day such a success.

Many thanks to all our helpers. Special thanks to Allan

Jones, who organised the Western Australian part of the visit of Bill Oddie with military precision, Chris Wilder and Peter Anson who between them ensured that the inside of the building was ready for occupation and looking spotless and to Clive Napier who was responsible for all the preparations around and outside the house.

The Committee is confident that the W. A. Group will go from strength to strength with its new accommodation, with members from north of the river taking an increasingly active part in our activities.

J. Blyth



Sketch of Perry House by J. Blyth

Members Contributions

ALBINO PIPIT ?

I visited Alfred Cove at about 2 pm on Monday 1st June. I observed a Richard's Pipit and a grey bird the same size at the edge of the cut grass on the top of the grassy bank leading down to the shore near the point. I approached to within 10 metres and observed the bird through my Kowa TSN-4 spotting telescope for about 10 minutes before I moved on.

The bird was clearly a pipit. It was the same size and body shape as the Richard's Pipit. It had pale orange/pink lower legs, and it was frequently bobbing its tail. The upper bill was very dark, and the lower bill mostly darkish but partly yellowish or pinkish depending on the light. There was a whitish stripe

above the eye similar to the Richard's Pipit, along with a brownish patch behind the eye and below the stripe.

The throat, breast and belly were white without any streaks. The top of the head, back, most of the wings and the tail were a mottled greyish colour. The outside primary feather (or maybe two) of the left wing was brownish.

It stayed in the vicinity of the Richard's Pipit, and behaved similarly. It mostly walked slowly along the cut edge, sometimes going up to half a metre into the uncut grass or on the cut grass up to three metres from the cut edge. Twice they flew a short distance further along the cut edge. The third time they flew down to a sandy area with sparse grass very near the edge of the water.

I have no access to an identification guide to the pipits of the world. However as the only major difference to the Richard's Pipit was the lack of most of the brown, I consider the most likely explanation is that it was an albino Richard's Pipit.

F. O'Connor

RUFIOUS TREECREEPER AGAIN

On 11 February 1992, about three weeks after Allan Burbidge's sighting of the species at Woodvale reported in the March WA Bird Notes (No. 61 p 4), I saw a Rufous Treecreeper on the Swan River foreshore at Dalkeith. The bird was foraging on the trunks of various trees, including introduced cypresses. It was being sporadically harassed by a Singing Honeyeater and spent little time on any individual tree. After three or four minutes it flew into thicker vegetation on the limestone cliff face and I lost sight of it.

Despite looking around the area several times over the next few days I did not see the Rufous Treecreeper again. Given their rarity on the Swan Coastal Plain, it is possible that it was the same vagrant specimen seen by Allan at Woodvale.

J. Blyth

COLLISIONS

The placement of some of the windows of my home is such that birds are able to see through two adjacent windows and appear to conclude there is a clear fly-way. Given the acute eyesight of birds it is a matter of some surprise that they do not appreciate the furniture and room between. However the consequence is that birds attempt to fly through one of the window panes with surprising frequency. The exception is the Grey Butcherbird whose visual acuteness enables it to halt before the glass and cling to the window frame prior to flying away.

The window has this year claimed the life of a Western Spinebill, a Brown Honeyeater and a Spotted Pardalote while giving a nasty jar to a Red Wattlebird, a Port Lincoln Ringneck, a Brown Honeyeater, a male Australian Magpie and sundry others not so incapacitated as to prevent their flying off before identification. The most recent collision was between the glass and a Splendid Fairy-wren, a female.

The fairy-wren was obviously dis-oriented by the collision and appeared to have damaged a wing. It fluttered circuitously outside the window calling all the time, while falling onto its back and regaining its feet and apparently unable to fly.

As soon as the struggles of the wren were observed by a Red Wattlebird it flew down to the injured wren on the ground and appeared to attempt to peck it, though not succeeding because of the erratic movements of the "prey". This "attack" resulted in five other Splendid Fairy-wren flying to the proximity of their "colleague" and fluttering round and above it while calling loudly. The Red Wattlebird departed promptly.

After some further struggles the injured bird suddenly ran very swiftly to cover, seven metres away, followed by the others on the wing. As far as could be ascertained by subsequent watching the injured bird recovered sufficiently to move on with the whole party of Splendid Fairy-wren as they moved through the garden. Assistance to an injured member of a group seems not unlikely, but I have not found any reference to such behaviour in Splendid Fairy-wren in the more accessible literature.

The area from which the wrens came, comprised groups of flowering *Grevillea* "Robyn Gordon", *Eucalyptus caesia* and *Eucalyptus pyriformis*. Red Wattlebirds are particularly attracted to *E. pyriformis* and defend it vigorously against intruders (here usually their own species and Brown and New Holland Honeyeater.) Was the Red Wattlebird simply taking further opportunity to defend its nectar territory or was the "attack" something more sinister?

B. Buchanan

CORAL BAY AUTUMN

March and April in Coral Bay were hot, dry months and when rain did fall at the end of April this marked the end of a nine-month dry spell.

During the hot, still afternoons a family of Pied Butcherbird usually rested in the tamarisk trees near our camp. They sang in subdued voices for hours at a time, their melodious trills and warbles giving us great pleasure.

Singing Honeyeater, Richard's Pipit and Silvereye foraged daily around the camp as did Variegated Fairy-wren. However the White-winged Fairy-wren, common in the nearby bushland, never came into the settlement.

During the hot, dry weather Little Crow flocked around the camps. Sadly they visited the nesting Osprey and often perched atop the Telecom Tower near the nesting bird. Then one or another would dart in quickly upon the Osprey which had to peck at them to drive them off. The Osprey produced no young during this time.

A pair of Brown Goshawk came in for a month, preying on the honeyeaters and finches. One day I saw a goshawk attempting to kill a Sacred Kingfisher and I drove the goshawk off. However it was time wasted as the same day a goshawk was seen eating a kingfisher in the park.

One hot day a strange bantam-like bird was seen standing in a puddle by our tap. It was in fact a Buff-banded Rail, the first I had seen.

Over a period of several weeks a pair of apparent flycatchers foraged actively over our lawns. They had no distinguishing features and never called. There was a slight yellowish sheen on their wings which were usually held horizontally with tail higher. I listed them as Kimberley Flycatcher, but I am not absolutely certain of this.

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Notes For Contributors

The Editor requests contributors to note :-

- *WABN normally only publishes material on WA birds
- *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 December Issue
7 November 1992**

