



# Western Australian Bird Notes

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Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

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No 64 December 1992

## Another Red-necked Phalarope at Rottnest

It appears that sightings of Red-necked Phalarope are very much on the increase in Australia. The first sighting was in Victoria in 1962 and in Western Australia on Rottnest in 1980 (but see below - Ed.) The Red-necked Phalarope now continues to be seen regularly and in greater numbers (Saunders & De Rebeira 1987). Nevertheless it is still exciting to see one, especially when you are the observer!

Kate Creed and myself were walking along the track on the south side of Government House Lake, Rottnest Island on 20 August 1992 in the late afternoon with the sun behind us. Kate suddenly noticed a bird standing on a small rock less than 20 metres away and about 2 metres from the shore. Immediately the bird moved off the rock into the water, but showed no haste to move away. In fact it turned to face us to give an excellent view of the well defined white throat and the U shaped red band from behind the eye, down the sides of the neck and joining across the breast. This pattern with the dark head and thin bill was enough for us to say immediately Red-necked Phalarope — with some degree of excitement!

The bird was alone and slowly but erratically swam away from us picking from the surface as it went. In the 15 minutes that we were observing it, it did not perform any of the "spinning motions" mentioned in text books and well remembered by me from my only previous encounter with this species. It finally took flight and became lost to view.

The next morning we walked to the lake again and were close to a rocky spit which juts from the eastern shore near the causeway. A few moments after a plane landed at the airport a flock of about 40 waders, mostly Ruddy Turnstone, with a few Red-necked Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and a Grey Plover landed on the spit about 20 metres from us. Looking at them with x8 binoculars as we had the previous day, in excellent viewing conditions, we saw a Red-necked Phalarope in the water at the back of the group.

Although our view was somewhat impaired by the presence of the other birds, we saw it well enough for identification

and assumed it was the same bird as we had seen the previous day. The brightness of the colouration, particularly the well defined white throat and red band leaves me in little doubt that the bird we had seen on the two occasions was a female in breeding plumage.

A phone call to Ian Standing was all that was necessary to bring him and his friends over to Rottnest. The bird was cooperative and still on Government House Lake and it was seen by Ian et al three days after the first sighting.

**M. Bailey, K. Creed**

### Reference:

Saunders D.A. and De Rebeira C.P.(1987) A review of sightings of Red-necked Phalaropes in Australia. *Australian Bird Watcher*. Vol. 12 (4) Dec 1987.

All the sightings of Red-necked Phalarope recorded in WABN have been at Leslie Salt Works at Port Hedland (1983, 1984, 1986, 1991 and again in 1992 — see Observations on page 3) or at Rottnest Island (1980, 1986, 1992). A 1979 sighting is given as "probably the first report of this species in the south-west" in August 1979, but the location is not stated. (see WABN No 13, March 1980)

A sighting exception was in November 1986, when a Red-necked Phalarope was seen at Lake Hinds in the Shire of Wongan-Ballidu, about 130 kilometres from the coast, the only 'inland' sighting.

**Editor.**

# WA Threatened Species List

WABN No 63 September 1992 gave among the Observations criteria, birds listed in Garnett (ed) (1992) Threatened and Extinct Birds of Australia RAOU Report No 82. Those birds listed which may be seen within the boundaries of WA are given below for the information of members. The list excludes several seabirds which do not breed in this State.

- Australasian Bittern** *Insufficiently Known*  
Possibly fewer than 100 pairs in the SW of WA. Mainly concentrated at the Lake Muir wetlands.
- Square-tailed Kite** *Rare*  
Mainly coastal and sub-coastal open forests and woodlands and inland along water courses of the SW and Kimberley.
- Red Goshawk** *Vulnerable*  
In coastal and sub-coastal regions of the Kimberley. About 350 pairs Australia wide.
- Grey Falcon** *Rare*  
Main habitat are regions of less than 250 mm rainfall around inland drainage systems.
- Freckled Duck** *Rare*  
Numbers appear to fluctuate markedly. Most WA breeding in the SW maybe 10 pairs per year.
- Cape Barren Goose (Western sub-sp)** *Endangered*  
Breeds only on the Recherche Archipelago; perhaps less than 1000 individuals.
- Malleefowl** *Vulnerable*  
Habitat clearance has fragmented the population and made it vulnerable to fire and feral predators.
- Chestnut-backed Button-quail** *Insuff Known*  
In Kimberley
- Painted Button-quail (Houtman Abrolhos)** *Vulnerable*  
Reasonably abundant but vulnerable to predators and fire.
- Lewin's Rail (WA sub-species)** *Extinct*  
Not seen since 1930's. Confined to swamps in SW corner of WA.
- Painted Snipe** *Insufficiently Known*  
Has become rare on Swan Coastal Plain and the whole of WA.
- Beach Thick-knee** *Vulnerable*  
Total Australian population may be 1000 only. Occurs in suitable habitat from Onslow north to the NT.
- Hooded Plover** *Rare*  
In SW WA both coastal and on salt lakes over 100km from the coast. Generally few seen but flocks occur.
- Fairy Tern (breeding only)** *Rare*  
Breeds around WA coast as far N as Admiralty Gulf.
- Lesser Noddy** *Rare*  
Breeds in Houtman Abrolhos. Possibly 80,000 pairs. Vulnerable to cyclone, oil spill and commercial fishing reducing prey.
- Partridge Pigeon** *Insufficiently Known*  
Occurs in NW Kimberley within 100 km of the coast.

- Eastern sub-species in the East Kimberley is vulnerable.
- Alexandra's Parrot** *Insufficiently Known-probably Rare*  
Nomadic and rarely seen. Throughout arid zone of WA.
- Blue Bonnet (Naretha sub-sp)** *Rare*  
In woodland on the Nullarbor fringe, mainly the western side. Scarce S of the trans railway.
- Scarlet-chested Parrot** *Rare*  
Found in Great Victoria Desert and occasionally further West and South. Can be locally common.
- Ground Parrot (W sub-sp)** *Endangered*  
Found with certainty only in Cape Arid and Fitzgerald River N.Ps. None found between. Possibly only 425 total.
- Night Parrot** *Insuff Known - Rare*  
Sightings have been reported in WA in the last 10 years.
- Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo (SW sub-sp)** *Insuff known*  
Restricted to sub-coastal forest from Perth to Albany.
- Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo** *Vulnerable*  
Breeding confined to the Wheatbelt, but non-breeding birds occur in the far south-west. Appears to be declining.
- Baudin's Black-Cockatoo** *Insufficiently Known*  
Found South and West of line Perth-Albany in forest dominated by Jarrah, Karri and Marri.
- Western Long-billed Corella (S. sub-sp)** *Vulnerable*  
About 1000 total. May be increasing. Centred round Lake Muir and surrounding districts.
- Masked Owl** *Rare*  
Southern sub-species occurs in broad coastal strip up to the Pilbara, Northern sub-species (insufficiently known) in the Kimberley and a sub-species inland (eg Nullarbor.)
- Noisy Scrub-bird** *Endangered*  
Population of 291 singing males. Mainly Two Peoples Bay and sites to the East.
- Purple-crowned Emu-wren (W. sub-sp)** *Vulnerable*  
About 7000 total. restricted to within 10 metres of riverine habitat in the Kimberley.
- Striated Grasswren (Sandplain sub-sp)** *Insuff Known*  
In semi-arid zone Pilbara to north of the Nullarbor. May be declining.
- Thick-billed Grasswren (W. sub-sp)** *Vulnerable*  
In the Northern half of the Peron Peninsular and immediately SE of Shark Bay..
- Rufous Bristlebird (W.sub-sp)** *Extinct*  
Coastal between Cape Mentelle and Cape Naturaliste.
- Western Bristlebird** *Endangered*  
1000 total in two sites E. of Albany. Increasing with exclusion of fire.
- Slender-billed Thornbill (W. sub-sp)** *Insuff Known*  
Found in shrubland and saline flats, Nullarbor Plain to Carnarvon.
- Western Whipbird (W. heath sub-sp)** *Endangered-Rare*  
In dense thickets with open overstorey Mt Taylor to Waychinicup River. 500 total.
- Western Whipbird (W. mallee sub-sp)** *Rare*  
Scattered from Stirling Range-Pingrup in W. to Ravensthorpe- Hopetoun in E. 4000 total.
- Cinnamon Quail-thrush (Nullarbor sub-sp)** *Rare*  
Confined to Nullarbor from Naretha (W)-85km N. of Loongana (N)-Arubiddy (S) and WA border (E); also on Nullarbor in SA.
- Crested Shrike-tit (W.sub-sp)** *Rare*

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South of 30 degrees S and W of Norseman. May no longer be on Swan Coastal Plain or N. of Perth.

**Star Finch** *Locally Common-Rare*

Round Lake Argyle, Ord River and along Pilbara waterways. May be declining.

**Yellow-rumped Mannikin** *Insufficiently Known*

Moderately common nr. Kununurra and to Katherine in NT.

**Gouldian Finch** *Endangered*

Has drastically declined since 1970's. Patchily distributed in Kimberley grassy woodlands.

# Observations

Compiled by the Observations Committee. Note: Shires are shown in brackets.

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

**Wandering Albatross** - 2, 26/8/92, Rottneest Island - GL \* 1 (stage 4 plumage), 30/8/92, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - MC, GM

**Yellow-nosed Albatross** - 150, 30/8/92, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - MC, GM

**Shy Albatross** - 1 juvenile, 30/8/92, Cape Leeuwin (Augusta-Margaret River) - MC, GM \* 5 juveniles, 30/8/92, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - MC, GM

**Darter** - 2 active nests (one with 5 eggs, other with sitting female), 13/10/92, Kent River between Owingup Swamp and South Coast Highway (Denmark) (new breeding record for this wetland) - RJ, AC

**Little Black Cormorant** - 10 nests with young, 13/10/92, Kent River between Owingup Swamp and South Coast Highway (Denmark) (new breeding record for this wetland) - RJ, AC

**Little Bittern** - 2, 8/10/92, Lake Jasper (Nannup) in agonisbaunea swamp (first definite record for this wetland) - RJ, AC \* 1, 14/10/92, Lake Saide (Denmark) (5 km SW of Young townsite), in Typha swamp - RJ, AC

**Australasian Bittern** - 6-8, 16/10/92, Lake Pleasant View (Albany) (near Manypeaks townsite) (high count for the south-west) - RJ, AC

**Domestic Goose** - 4+, nest with 9 eggs, 24/10/92, Lake Monger (Metro) - AB, JR

**Freckled Duck** - 2, 22/8/92, Gibbs Road Swamp, Armadale (Metro) - DM

**Black Kite** - 1, Oct 92, Karroun Hill Nature Reserve (Mt Marshall) - BBu

**Australian Hobby** - 2 adults and 1 young, 15/9/92, near Buntine (Dalwallinu) - BBu

**Malleefowl** - 5 plus an active mound, 17/9/92, 24 km NE of Dalwallinu (Dalwallinu) - BBu

**Peafowl** - 4, 4/10/92, Lake Joondalup north (Metro), near hospital - ID

**Guineafowl** - 4, 8/92, Neil Hawkins Park, Lake Joondalup north (Metro) - MBa

**Inland Dotterel** - 1, 1/11/92, Austin Bay Nature Reserve, Peel Inlet (Murray) - JB, CW

**Eastern Curlew** - 16, 10/10/92, Coodanup, Mandurah (Murray) - TK

**Ruff** - 1, 10/10/92, Coodanup, Mandurah (Murray) - TK

**Pomarine Skua** - 5, 1/11/92, North Mole, Fremantle (Metro) - CW, AD, SK

**Silver Gull** - 1, wholly dusky grey, 8/9/92, South Perth (Metro) - PC

**Pacific Gull** - 1, immature, 13/7/92, North Mole, Fremantle (Metro) - MC, GM

**Common Tern** - 1, 10/10/92, Mandurah (Murray) - TK

**Rainbow Lorikeet** - 5, 30/10/92, Wanneroo (Metro) - AB

**Rainbow Bee-eater** - 2, 27/9/92 (early arrival for this species), Dryandra State Forest (Cuballing) - GL

**Western Yellow Robin** - 3, 13/9/92, "Lowlands", c. 10 km SW of Mundijong (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) (rare on Swan Coastal Plain) - JR

**Crested Shrike-tit** - 1, 1/8/92, Yarra Rd, c. 15 km SE of The Lakes (Mundaring) - BBa, ND, MC \* 3, 29/8/92, Maurice Road off Caves Road (Augusta-Margaret River) - MC, GM

**Golden Whistler** - several, 12-13/9/92, "Lowlands" c. 10 km SW of Mundijong (Serpentine-Jarrahdale) (uncommon on Swan Coastal Plain) - AB and RAOU excursion

**Southern Whiteface** - 8, 16/9/92, 30 km ENE of Dalwallinu (Dalwallinu) (at or near W margin in this part of range) - BBu

**Brown-headed Honeyeater** - 1, 15/9/92, near Buntine (Dalwallinu) (near inland margin in this part of range) - BBu

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

**Straw-necked Ibis** - 24 active nests, 23/10/92, nests on ground on island in salt lake near Yalgoo (Yalgoo) - PF, JBW

**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** - 24, 23/10/92, salt lake near Yalgoo (Yalgoo) - PF, JBW

**Freckled Duck** - 2, 20/8/92, Lignum Swamp, 26 km NE of Mt Vettors HS (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) (male in breeding colours and giving "axle grind" call indicative of early stages of

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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 March Issue**  
**19 February 1993**

breeding HANZAB pp. 1166-8) - RJ

**Blue-billed Duck** - 1 (male), 21/8/92, Brown Lagoon, 13 km E of Rowles Lagoon (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - RJ, RV \* 1 (female), 21/8/92, Rowles Lagoon (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - RJ, RV \* 1 adult male, 30/9/92, found freshly dead near Edah Station HS (Yalgo) - S/LL \* 1, female, 10/11/92, Thundelarra Station (Yalgo) - RJ

**Black-breasted Buzzard** - 1, 26/8/92, Nerren Nerren Station (Shark Bay) - AB, JR \* 1, 2/9/92, Toolonga Nature Reserve (Shark Bay) (c. 80 km SE of Overlander Roadhouse) - AB, JR

**Marsh Harrier** - 1, 21/8/92, Brown Lagoon (13 km E of Rowles Lagoon) (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - RJ, RV, ACh

**Australian Crake** - 2 old nests, 8/92, Canegrass Swamp (18 km S of Goongarrie Hill) (Menzies) (no breeding records in this area) - RJ, RV, ACh \* 3+, 20/8/92, Lignum Swamp, 26 km NE of Mt Veters HS (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - RJ

**Hooded Plover** - 2, 15/8/92, salt lake just E of Newman Rock (Dundas) - MB

**Red-necked Phalarope** - 11, 28/9/92, Port Hedland saltworks (Port Hedland) - DW

**Silver Gull** - 55-60, 25/10/92, Warriedar Station (Yalgo) - PF, JW

**Pacific Gull** - 1, 25/10/92, Warriedar Station (Yalgo) - PF, JW

**Whiskered Tern** - 300-400, 3/10/92, over salt lakes near Yalgo (Yalgo); many starting to nest on samphire on 23/10/92 - PF, JBW \* c. 45 pairs with nests, building to small chicks, 6/11/92, freshwater swamp on Thundelarra Station (Yalgo) (unusual to breed on freshwater) - PF, JBW

**Gull-billed Tern** - 67 pairs with nests, building to small runners, 23/10/92, island in salt lake near Yalgo (Yalgo) - PF, JBW

**Clamorous Reed-warbler** - 1, 10/11/92, Thundelarra Station (Yalgo) - RJ

**Little Grassbird** - 8+, 20/8/92, Lignum Swamp, 26 km NE of Mt Veters HS (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - RJ \* three records on Thundelarra Station (Yalgo): recent nest, 24/10/92 - PF, JBW; nest under construction, 6/11/92 - PF, JBW; 1, 10/11/92 - RJ

**Slaty-backed Thornbill** - 3-4, 26/8/92, 17 km NE of Nerren Nerren HS (Shark Bay) - AB, JR

#### **KIMBERLEY**

**Little Bittern** - 3-5, 23/7/92, Lake Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - PBT

**Black Bittern** - 1, 18/7/92, Dunham River Bridge, Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Black Falcon** - 1, 14/9/92, King River near Wyndham (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**White-browed Crake** - ca. 20, 23/7/92, Lake Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - PBT

**Little-ringed Plover** - 1, 10/92, Broome Sewage Ponds (Broome) - DW

**Pectoral Sandpiper** - 3, 14/10/92, at a bore on Roebuck Plains (Broome) - DW

**Long-toed Stint** - 1, 8/9/92, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) - FO \* 8, 9/9/92, artesian bores, Roebuck Plains Station (Broome) - BBO

**Ruff** - 1, 10/92, Broome Sewage Ponds (Broome) - DW

**Eastern Grass Owl** - 5 (including one in a mist net), 10/92, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - PPF

**Black-tailed Treecreeper** - 4 (2 banded), 6/9/92, Tagarana Bore, Roebuck Plains Station (Broome) - BBO (First record for BBO)

**Painted Firetail** - c. 1000, 1/9/92, Mary River bridge, c. 100 km SW of Hall's Creek (Hall's Creek) - FO

**Gouldian Finch** - 2 immature, 12/9/92, 113 km W of Fitzroy River (Hall's Creek) - FO

#### **Observer Codes**

AB = Allan Burbidge	JB = John Blyth
AC = Alan Clarke	JR = Julie Raines
ACh = Andy Chapman	JBW = Basil Woods
AD = Adam Dudley	MB = Mary Bremner
AJM = John Malcolm	MBa = Mike Bamford
BBA = Bryan Barrett	MC = Michael Craig
BBu = Bruce Buchanan	PBT = Peregrine Bird
BBO = Broome Bird	Tours (per FO)
Observatory	PC = Peter Coyle
CW = Chris Wilder	PJF = Peter Fullagar
DM = Dusty Miller	PF = Phil Fuller
DW = Doug Watkins	RJ = Roger Jaensch
FO = Frank O'Connor	RV = Rodney Vervest
GL = Graham Little	SK = Simon King
GM = Glenn Moore	S/LL = Sharon & Lance
ID = Ian Davis	Lee-Steer
	TK = Tony Kirkby

## **Members Contributions**

### **REACTIONS TO RAPTORS**

I wrote of the reactions of waterbirds to predators in WABN No. 62, June 1992. I wrote "Whistling Kite..... rarely evoke any reaction from waterbirds" (p.5). In this I was premature, writing before the (usually) annual arrival of Black-tailed Native-hen.

As befits a "regular" migrant, the times of arrival of Black-tailed Native-hen in my garden at Wannamal are surprisingly uniform. In 1987 arrival was 17 July, 25 June in 1988, failed to arrive 1989, 4 August in 1990, 18 July in 1991 and this year 1992, arrival was 20 July. Arrival within a four day period in the three years 1987, 1991 and 1992 is remarkable. Breeding has commenced in August each year it has occurred, 1987, 1988 and 1992.

This year numbers were higher than since 1986 when a flock of 200+ was present. This year the maximum seen was 90+. When this 90+ group was in the garden, making devastating assaults on my newly planted atriplex sp (bad) and the Capeweed (good), I had numerous occasions to see their reaction to Whistling Kite, which were breeding nearby. Each time a Whistling Kite appeared, the flock both scattered and ran to cover, frequently gathering under a *Melaleuca raphiophylla* at the swamp edge. Clearly Whistling Kite alarm Black-tailed Native-hen in a way which is not evident with the more "water-borne" — ducks etc. It is necessary to add however that when those breeding had separated from the flock they seemed not to show much if any comparable alarm. Perhaps the alarm is a flock reaction.

It was also of interest to note that the flock of Black-tailed Native-hen were scattered and driven off by the repeated attacks of a Grey Butcherbird when they lingered in part of its food gathering territory. It was raising a brood some 200 metres away.

I then recalled WABN No. 40, December 1986. On page

five, describing an incident at Le Lievre Swamp, it is written "a group of Black-tailed Native-hens, numbering about two hundred and fifty had taken up a position on the edge of the lake, acting like 'a la carte meals' for any predator that cared to sample them.....They were attacked in turn by a Marsh Harrier, a Brown Falcon and two Whistling Kites, taking frantic evasive action only when it was generally too late".

The Whistling Kite is "...a carrion eater....feeding on poisoned and trapped rabbits, dead sheep and the carcasses of other animals. Besides rabbits the bird feeds on grasshoppers, but does not harm lambs or poultry" (Serventy and Whittell 1976, p.163). Pizzey (1980) says "Groups gather to roost or feed at carrion. Also takes live prey: harries feeding birds such as ibis, forcing them to disgorge" (p 81). Hollands (1984) categorises Whistling Kite as "Mainly a scavenger and carrion eater.....Live prey taken includes kitten rabbits, rats, lizards, small snakes and occasionally birds and fish." (p 193).

Serventy and Whittell (1976) give the weight of the Whistling Kite as male 23 ounces, female 30 ounces. They also give the weight of the Black-tailed Native-hen as (a surprisnly low) 13.5 ounces. Consequently a Whistling Kite needs to attack a hen of between 45% and 58% of the kite body-weight. Given that Marsh Harrier are known to successfully attack Eurasian Coot (sometimes with difficulty — see WABN No. 55, September 1990), whose body-weight (on Serventy and Whittell 1976 figures) is between 79% and 100% of that of the Marsh Harrier, a Whistling Kite attack on Black-tailed Native-hen seems less of a feat.

Given the apparent carrion preference of the Whistling Kite as described above the question is whether Whistling Kite actually strike down Black-tailed Native-hen adults as prey. The Le Lievre description is equivocal on this point. It is apparent that flocks of Black-tailed Native-hens may take alarm at Whistling Kite. Are they in fear of their lives? or are they afraid of losing their last meal?

Has any reader unequivocal evidence of Whistling Kite killing prey as large as Black-tailed Native-hen?

B. Buchanan

## GREY SHRIKE-THRUSH DIET

We have a pair of Grey Shrike-thrush nesting in our garden in Cranbrook.

Last year they nested in a small plastic bucket in our open shed where they hatched and reared 2 young. This year they freshened up the bucket nest, but then built on the top of a nest recently built and occupied by a pair of thornbill.

On the 1st September there were 2 eggs in the nest, on the 20th they were feeding the two young. On the 27th I saw the male on the garden fence beating something to death. Later it was seen to be pecking and pulling bits off it. Inspection at 1600 hours revealed it was a 7cm long frog. The thrush had impaled the frog on a splinter on top of the fence to a depth of 2cm at its throat!

The Grey Shrike-thrush returned regularly and continued pulling the frog to pieces after I had taken photographs. By 1800 hours the frog was all gone.

D. Lawrence

(Pizzey (1980) says the Grey Shrike-thrush is "sometimes predatory on smaller birds ... and have been known to take surprisingly large items like feathertail gliders and green tree frogs" (p.248). Boles (1988) says "The Grey Shrike-thrush is perhaps the most carnivorous songbird of its size. Although it

has been recorded as eating fruit and seeds on occasion, the bulk of its diet consists of insects and other invertebrates, frogs, lizards, mice and even pygmy possums" (p.250).

Pizzey G. & Doyle R. (1980). *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins, Sydney.

Boles W.E. (1988). *The Robins and Flycatchers of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, London.

Ed.).

## SOUTH COAST ALBATROSS

Due to the strong winds that had been blowing for most of the week my friend Glenn Moore and I decided to head south for the weekend to see if any seabirds had been blown landwards. We left late on Friday 28th August for Cape Leeuwin and were up early on Saturday to see what had arrived. Although the wind had dropped considerably, we obtained reasonable views of a Black-browed Albatross plus 9 Australasian Gannet. There were also some 20 albatross and 50 all-dark petrels that were too far out to identify.

By lunchtime activity had diminished so we went to Maurice Road (off Caves Road) to do some karri forest birding. Here some White-breasted Robin, Red-winged Fairy-wren and three Crested Shrike-tit (two males and a female) provided some cheer despite the rainy conditions.

On Sunday morning it was up early on the Cape again and luckily the winds had arrived too. By mid-morning we had logged 8 Australasian Gannet, 3 Yellow-nosed Albatross, 3 Black-browed Albatross and a juvenile Shy Albatross with the numbers of unidentified-birds similar to the day before. Activity seemed to fall off by mid morning so we went to Cape Naturaliste to see what was there. After the long walk down to the Cape we were greeted by large numbers of Yellow-nosed Albatross with the odd Black-browed and Shy thrown in for good measure. There were also large numbers of Wedge-tailed Shearwaters much further south than I thought they occurred (recourse to the HANZAB showed that Cape Naturaliste is the southern extremity of their range). After watching the streams of albatross fly past for a couple of hours Glenn Moore remarked sarcastically "all we need now to round the day off is a Wandering Albatross".

Strange things do happen in this world and the next thing I did on looking through my telescope was to focus on a large albatross out at sea (I thought it was probably a Shy). Only when it banked to reveal its gleaming white back did I realise that I was looking at a Wandering Albatross. We could hardly believe our luck. The huge bird soared in until it was only about 60 metres away, its 3.3 metres wingspan dwarfing the numerous Yellow-nosed Albatross around it. I was filled with awe at seeing so huge a bird.

The rest of the day seemed something of an anti-climax, but still the albatross and shearwater streamed by. By the end of the day we had logged 100 Wedge-tailed Shearwater, 150 Yellow-nosed Albatross, 3 Black-browed Albatross, 5 Shy Albatross (all juveniles), one Wandering Albatross and 28 Australasian Gannet.

A memorable weekend, that certainly greatly increased my knowledge and field experience with albatross. For example, I found from HANZAB that the age distribution of the Shy Albatross we observed was due to the fact that the fledglings disperse widely whereas the adults tend to remain at the Tasmanian colonies all year round.

Finally I would like to encourage other members to make similar trips. Not only will you be graced by the presence of

some truly beautiful birds you will also be contributing greatly to our very fragmentary knowledge of seabird distribution in West Australian waters. If anyone would be interested in setting up reasonably regular pelagic trips out of Busselton, Augusta or Albany next winter please give me a ring (09) 384 5398 so I can gauge whether it would be financially and logistically feasible.

M. Craig

## PURPLE SWAMPHEN DIET

Eric McCrum of the Gould League passes on information of the taking of a Black Swan cygnet by a Purple Swamphen at Tomato Lake, Belmont. The cygnet was found to have had its neck broken. Pizzey comments in Pizzey & Doyle (1980) a *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Collins, Sydney on page 99 that the larger species of *Rallidae*, which would include Purple Swamphen, are "occasionally predatory on young birds".

WABN Number 56 December 1990 records a similar attack on a gosling at Lake Monger.

Editor

## CHALLENGES TO RAPTORS

Hollands (1984) has written admirably of the hearing of alarm calls coming nearer as a raptor approaches the nest. Recently (September) I had the pleasure of hearing such a progressive alarm when near the nest of an Australian Hobby.

It was about 6.45 am. The alarms were dominated by those of Galah, not at that time of that day stirring in the Reserve (at Buntine) in which the Australian Hobby nest was placed. An Australian Hobby passed very quickly a little in front of me at about 20 metres height, skimming over the lower eucalypts to swoop upward to the nest, situated some 30 metres above ground.

My view of the nest being somewhat obstructed from my then position, I had it in full view in time to see the hobby, perched on the edge of the nest, leaning down into it as though to feed young. A few moments later a second Australian Hobby flashed by, swooped upward towards the nest but by-passed it to settle and preen in a tree some 50 metres distant.

The first hobby, still at the nest edge, then flew down to a dead branch some 10 metres below the nest where it appeared to settle, fluffing its feathers — it was cool. After a minute or so, a group of Galah came to the nest tree and flew around the settled hobby, screeching loudly. The settled bird appeared wholly unmoved. Two Galah perched on the same branch, one either side (but at a respectable distance) the meantime raising and lowering their heads and calling. Others in the party settled around the nest tree all keeping up a raucous commotion.

Finally one of the Galah on the same branch as the Australian Hobby, flew off the branch and fluttered steadily upward until it was at nest level, when it perched on the edge of the nest. This was too much for the hobby which in turn flew to the nest where it also perched on the edge. The Galah, turning its head and craning forward seemed as if it were "looking at the baby" (if there were such in the nest.)

No action was taken by the adjacent Australian Hobby but after about a minute the Galah turned and left the nest edge to "watch" from a nearby small branch. After "watching" another 30 seconds or so, the Galah flew off accompanied by the rest of the group.

Another raptor incident occurred close to my home. A Whistling Kite flying slowly at about 30 metres height was "challenged" by a Willie Wagtail. The Whistling Kite, unfazed and attracted by something in the swamp below, began to circle

slowly, allowing the Willie Wagtail to rise above it and attempt further harassment by fluttering and calling close to the kite. The Whistling Kite made no obvious response and to my surprise the Willie Wagtail alighted on the right wing of the Whistling Kite at the apex of the "curve" of the wing and circled with it as "passenger".

When the Whistling Kite flapped to gain a little height, circling the meanwhile, the Willie Wagtail fluttered above as before. However as soon as the kite stopped flapping the Willie Wagtail again alighted on the same wing in the same place and again partook of a circular downward ride.

The Whistling Kite finally lost such height as to obstruct my view and when it came into sight again it was without passenger or challenger.

B. Buchanan

## B B C B Q

Big Bird says it is shorebird time again:

- 1) Do Sooty and Pied Oystercatcher inter-breed ?
- 2) Hooded Plover occurs on both the coast and inland WA. Where else in Australia does the Hooded Plover occur inland ?
- 3) Which wader visiting WA makes the longest migratory journeys ?
- 4) Ruddy Turnstones can move stones greater than their body-weight. How much greater ?
- 5) Red-necked Avocet swim — are their feet webbed ?
- 6) Do Black-winged Stilt swim ?
- 7) Adult Silver Gull mature into a red bill. Does the colour brightness vary thereafter ?
- 8) Which WA shorebirds are essentially nocturnal ?
- 9) Most shorebirds migrate from North to South. Which one migrates in reverse ?
- 10) Which tern, seen in WA, is to be found on every continent ?

Answers on Page 13

## Notices

### ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting will be held at the Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre on Monday 1st February 1993 at 8pm sharp.

All positions will be declared vacant and office bearers will be elected for the year. Nomination forms may be obtained from the office and sent to the Secretary or handed in prior to

commencement of the meeting.

## 50th ANNIVERSARY

There will be a special day on Saturday 22nd May 1993 for members in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the WA Group of the RAOU. Mark this day, 22 May 1993, in your diary. See the March 93 WABN for details.

## LOCATION HELP WANTED

Two Hooded Plover were seen at Salt Lake or Swamp (or possibly at a salt lake or swamp) in the Shire of Plantagenet on 8 September 1984. This was reported in WABN in Observations. The Editor wishes to ascertain the precise location of Salt Lake/Swamp in Plantagenet Shire to which the Observation refers. If anyone can help please write to the Editor direct or via Perry House.

## RUFIOUS TREECREEPER SIGHTINGS

WABN Number 61 March 1992 referred to the sighting of a Rufous Treecreeper at Woodvale as "only the second from the coastal plain since 1920" (p5). I must thank R.S. Stranger for reminding me of the sighting of a Rufous Treecreeper at Bayswater Bird Sanctuary by Eric Singleton in July 1991 (see WABN Number 60 December 1991.)

Rufous Treecreeper was also shown by S. Keeling in his species list for Alfred Cove/Point Waylen, published in WABN Number 43 September 1987.

Editor

## LAKE BARNES

In WABN No. 62 June 1992 on page 5 I erroneously referred to Lake Brown, near to Lake Erie. The lake nearby and the property of the same name is Lake Barnes. Apologies for the error and any confusion caused.

B. Buchanan

## BLACK-HEADED GULL

R.S. Stranger writes that J.E. du Pont, author of *Philippine Birds*, states that Black-headed Gull occur in the Philippines, on the islands of Luzon and Mindanao and further that he has observed the species on Negros Island. In WABN Number 60 December 1991 F. O'Connor stated the Black-headed Gull did not occur in the Philippines (p2.)

Editor

## SLIDES WANTED

We are bringing our slide collection of Western Australian birds up to date. Members who are prepared to donate slides or have slides copied, please contact Peel Howden on (09) 330 4665.

## RAINBOW LORIKEET IN PERTH AREA

In recent years the Rainbow Lorikeet has become more abundant in the western suburbs of Perth and in the South Perth area. It has also been reported further afield. For example, the species was recorded at Wanneroo for the first time in late 1991 and has been present ever since.

There is some concern that the Rainbow Lorikeet will expand even further and that it may compete seriously for nest hollows with local species.

I am interested in hearing from any observer who has noted

a change in abundance (or no change) in any area in recent years. I am particularly interested in hearing about nest sites and of any observed interaction with other species, especially other parrots. Information on food sources would also be helpful.

Information can be sent to the RAOU office, or I can be contacted on 405 5109 (BH) or 306 1642 (AH).

A. Burbidge

## Malleefowl Conservation

The Malleefowl is of special significance to the people of Gnowangerup for the Shire takes its name after the word "Gnow", the name of the Malleefowl in the local Nungyar Aboriginal language. According to legend, Gnowangerup is the place where the Gnow or Mallee Hen made her nest. The bird features in the Shire's crest and the Gnowangerup district High School's crest. Consequently when members of the Gnowangerup Land Conservation District realised the Malleefowl had declined so much in recent years such that it might become locally extinct, they contacted the WA Threatened Species Network Co-ordinator.

### Conservation status of the Malleefowl in Western Australia

Knowledge of the Malleefowl in Western Australia is patchy, despite the fact that the species has been recommended for addition to the state list of threatened fauna and despite its overall decline in Australia (Garnett 1992a). The most comprehensive distribution data set for the species in Western Australia is the Atlas of Australian Birds (Blakers et al. 1984).

The species has already disappeared from several areas of the south-west: the Busselton-Cape Naturaliste-Cape Leeuwin coastal fringe, the Lake Muir area (Storr 1991), the Kellerberrin district (Saunders and Curry 1989) and probably other areas of the wheatbelt where most of the favourable habitat has been cleared.

The bird was recorded in several reserves of the wheatbelt in the late seventies (J. Dell et al: Records of the WA Museum Supplement No. 4, 5, 7, 9, 13: 1977-81). It occurs in the Shire of Shark Bay (Storr 1985a) and is sparsely distributed in the arid interior (Storr 1985b). A study has been in progress for several years at the Eyre Bird Observatory where several Malleefowl pairs are being monitored. The core of the bird's distribution in Western Australia today is the mallee lands of the South-west of the state, particularly where some large areas of native bush remain.

A vivid account of the biology of the Malleefowl in New South Wales was published by H.J. Frith in a captivating book in 1962. To date this remains the most comprehensive account of the life history of the species.

The main causes for decline (see Garnett 1992a and b for a summary) are the clearing of the bird's native habitat (Frith 1962), fire (Benshemesh 1990), lack of food due to the disappearance of understorey because of rabbits and domestic stock (Frith 1962), and predation by foxes (Priddel 1990). Other causes have been suggested: inbreeding in isolated populations due to fragmentation of habitat, lack of recruitment of young birds and road kills.

Western Australia lags behind New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia where research has been carried out for several years and conservation plans are in the process of being produced. Despite the fact that Western Australia probably

