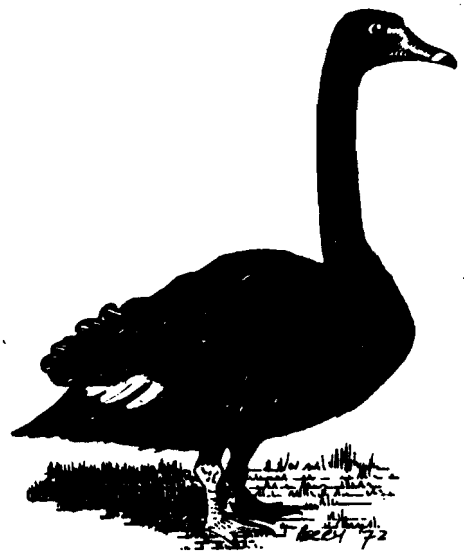



# Western Australian Bird Notes

**Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group**
**Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union**

No 70 June 1994


## Submerging sandpiper, plenteous plovers, murderous magpie

### SANDPIPER SUBMERGES

On the 20 February 1994 whilst birdwatching on the Chapman River near Geraldton, I observed a Common Sandpiper being pursued in flight across open water by a Brown Goshawk. As the raptor gained on it's potential prey the sandpiper was observed to dive completely underwater.

The sandpiper remained submerged for a few seconds before surfacing and flying to the safety of the bank. The Brown Goshawk having missed its chance continued on in search of other prey.

I was greatly surprised by the whole incident as I did not think it was in the nature of waders to take refuge underwater. When life depends on it, perhaps anything will be tried.

**T. Vigilante**

### MAGPIE ATTACKS

On 3rd April at 5.30 pm, my husband heard a commotion outside our house. He thought it was a cat after the birds. Instead he saw an Australian Magpie pecking a live Western Yellow Robin and I was called to the scene.

The magpie was a juvenile, probably born on our bush block last October. The Western Yellow Robin appeared to be an adult bird. The magpie was perched on a log and was periodically pecking at the robin, which lay on the log and kept flapping its wings. My husband was so disgusted with the magpie that he threw a stone at it, but missed. The magpie then flew off with the unfortunate robin in its beak and landed on a distant tree before flying down out of sight. Has anyone else seen a magpie take another bird?

**L. Hassan**

### LESCHENAULT PLOVERS

On Sunday 6 February 1994 I was making my regular count of the waders around Pickles Point on the south end of Leschenault Inlet, Bunbury. The tide was high and all the waders were on the dredge spoil from the harbour extension. I counted 183 Grey Plover and three Pacific Golden Plover along the edge of the wet area.

While moving to obtain a better view I disturbed three plovers. Large Sand Plover are not uncommon, but when I turned my 20x telescope on the birds at a range of 20 metres, I was surprised to see there were two with noticeably short bills. With the birds side by side, two had bills about the same length as the distance from eye to front of the head, while the third bird had a bill about two thirds or more of a head length. These three then joined another thirty birds which were hiding in the rough, dry ground some thirty metres away. These thirty were all Mongolian Sand Plover.

The 183 count of Grey Plover represents the largest number recorded on the Inlet and the second highest in the South-West of WA (Supplement to WABN No 68). It was also the first record of Mongolian Plover for the Leschenault Inlet.

**G. Shannon**

### *and* KELMSCOTT ROBINS

Following an earlier major fire on the Kelmscott Scarp in March 1988, I observed a juvenile Scarlet Robin about 2 Kms west of the scarp in native trees planted around the Westfield Park Primary School oval. This was my first sighting of Scarlet Robin on the coastal plain since commencing weekly surveys in 1985. After a fire on 20 May 1994 I again saw a juvenile Scarlet Robin.

There seem two possible reasons for their presence. One could be a temporary displacement from fire devastated habitat; this being the robins' original territory. Another reason could be that young birds wander outside their territorial areas in Autumn (as occurs in Victoria and Tasmania — see Blakers et al (1984) p 367.

Adult Scarlet Robin on Kelmscott Scarp appear to be altitudinal migrants. Sightings tend to be more frequent on the lower scarp slopes in summer and autumn and on the upper slopes in winter and spring.

**G. Marston**


Reference: Blakers M, Davies SJJF, Reilly PN (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, RAOU, Melbourne University Press.

# Observations

Compiled by the Observations Committee. Shires are in brackets.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

**Cattle Egret** - 1, 10/5/94, Claremont (Claremont) - PS

**Great Egret** - 44, 3/4/94, Jandabup Lake (Wanneroo) - AB, JR

**Little Egret** - 22+, 29/12/93, Mandurah (Mandurah) - IS, JH * 25, 12/2/94, Island Point, Harvey Estuary (Mandurah) - AB, MJB (high counts for the SW of WA)

**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** - 60, 3/94, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale-Kelmscott) (high number at this site) - SN * 114, 27/3/94, Jandabup Lake (Wanneroo) (high number for SW) - AB

**Chestnut Teal** - 1, 27/3/94, Lake Monger (Perth) - IS * 2, 14/2/94, Lake Joondalup South (Wanneroo) - JB * 4, 6/3/94, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - RS

**Pink-eared Duck** - 200, 9/3/94, Lake Joondalup South (Wanneroo) (High number this site) - GL

**Peregrine Falcon** - 1, 16/2/94, Vasse Estuary, Busselton (Busselton) - RP * 1, 20/3/94, Lake Monger (Perth) - IS, BS * 2, 17/4/94, Mt Cook (Wandering) - IS, BS

**Malleefowl** - 2, 21/4/94, Karroun Hill Nature Reserve (Mt Marshall) - BB * 1, 17/12/93, Useless Loop Road, Shark Bay (Shark Bay) - TV

**Spotless Crake** - 10+, 20/3/94, Lake Monger (Perth) - IS, BS, DN, JN

**Eurasian Coot** - 3000+, 26/3/94, Joondalup Lake (Wanneroo) - AB, JR

**Black-fronted Plover,** 97, 16/3/94, Adventure World wetland, near Bibra Lake (Cockburn) - JH

**Hooded Plover** - 1, 28/12/93, Lake Clifton (Murray) - MB * 38 (about one-third in juvenile plumage), 25/2/94, Fitzgerald River National Park (Jerramungup) - BN * 44, 30/4/94, Lake Preston (Wanneroo) - BW * 2, 13/5/94, Cape Leeuwin (Augusta-Margaret River) - IS, BS

**Double-banded Plover** - 1, 6-7/4/94, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale-Kelmscott) - TK

**Large Sand Plover** - 1, 26/10/93, Quindalup sand bar, Dunsborough (Busselton) (uncommon in the lower SW cnr of WA) - RP

**Banded Stilt** - 1000+, 16/2/94, Vasse Estuary, Busselton (high number this wetland) (Busselton) - MJB

**Wood Sandpiper** - 10, 13/3/94, Jandabup Lake (Wanneroo) - AB

**Terek Sandpiper** - 9, 30/10/93, mouth of Preston River, Bunbury (Bunbury) - RP

**Red Knot** - 120, 8/2/94, Pelican Point, Swan River (Nedlands) - MBy, FO

**Pomarine Skua** - 20+, 6/5/94, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - FO

**Silver Gull** - 1, blackish all over except for smudgy white nape; legs and bill reddish, 9/93, Coogee (Cockburn) KL * 1, sooty all over, black legs, dark reddish black bill, 1/94, Mullaloo Beach (Wanneroo) - DC * 2200, 12/2/94, Lake Cooloongup (Rockingham) - AB (high number for this site)

**White-winged Tern** - 100+ (many in breeding plumage), 25/3/94, South Yunderup (Murray) - TK

**Roseate Tern** - 7 in breeding plumage, 7/3/94, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - JH, IS

**Rainbow Lorikeet** - about 50, 2/94, Attadale (Melville) - PH * 9, 5/94, Lake Goollelal (Wanneroo) - MJB (this species is increasing in abundance in the Kingsley-Wanneroo area)

**Regent Parrot** - 1, 27/3/94, Lake Monger (Perth) - IS, BS * 1, 25/4/94, Yokine (Stirling) - IS (unusual in suburban areas; possible aviary escapees)

**Fork-tailed Swift** - 50+, 13/3/94, mouth of Poison Creek, Cape Arid National Park (Esperance) - SR, AR * 5, 20/3/94, Morley (Bayswater) - HvW

**Tree Martin** - 1000+, 3/94, Geordie Bay, Rottnest - MCa

**Gilbert's Whistler** - 1 female, 21/4/94, Karroun Hill Nature Reserve (Mt Marshall) - BB

**Restless Flycatcher** - 1, 7/5/94, Thomson's Lake (Cockburn) - MM, RS

**House Sparrow** - about 60, breeding, early 1994, Mariginiup (Wanneroo) - MM (the APB is controlling this population)

**Australian Magpie-lark** - 200, 25/4/94, corner Nicholson Road and Thomas Street, Oakford (Armadale-Kelmscott) - MJB

ARID ZONE (including the Pilbara, Gascoyne, interior and Nullabor)

**Australian White** (Sacred) **Ibis** - 1, 15/4/94, near mangroves, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) (rarely recorded in this area) - AB

**Royal Spoonbill** - 3, 11/1/94, man-made ponds near corner David Brand Drive and Babbage Island Road, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) (rarely recorded in this area) - GMo

**Freckled Duck** - 5, 6/4/94, Carnage Lake, 4 km S of Rowles Lagoon (Boulder) - BM & RAOU Campout

**Marsh Harrier** - 1, 10/1/94, Hamelin Pool, Shark Bay (Shark Bay) - GMo

**Grey Falcon** - 1, 4/5/94, Boolathana Station, north of Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - AB

**Banded Stilt** - 1500, 4/94, Cargills Salt Works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG

**Red-necked Avocet** - 5000, 4/94, Cargills salt works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG

**Gallinago sp. snipe** - 1, 18/1/94, Nanutarra Roadhouse, Pilbara (Ashburton) - GMo

**Asian Dowitcher** - estimated 100 before migration, April 94, Cargills Salt Works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG

**Red-necked Stint** - 3000+, April 94, Cargills Salt Works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** - estimated 1000 before migration, 4/94, Cargills salt works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG

**Barking Owl** - 2, 24/3/94, Weeli Wolli Spring, Marillana Station (Nullagine) - MJB

**Common Bronzewing** - 100+, 8/4/94, Dead Man's Soak, Nineteen Mile Rocks, Goongarrie National Park (Menzies) (arriving at dusk, landing nearby and walking into water) - BM & RAOU Campout

**Gilbert's Whistler** - 1, male, 3/4/94, Ryan's Find Road on track to Mt Walton, 213 km S of Jaurdi Station HS (Coolgardie) - HC, BM & RAOU Campout see amendment #71

**Thick-billed Grasswren** - 1, 9/4/94, 7.5 km south of Denham (Shark Bay) - AB

KIMBERLEY

**Pied Heron** - 1, 4/94, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) (rarely recorded in west Kimberley) - BBO, GS et al.

**Cattle Egret** - 2, 5/94, Broome (Broome) (rarely recorded in the west Kimberley) - GS, PC
**Yellow-billed Spoonbill** - 1, 16/5/94, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO
**Radjah Shelduck** - 1, 16/3/94, Argyle Village sewage ponds (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO
**Letter-winged Kite** - 1, 25/3/94 and Apr 94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO
**Black Falcon** - 1, 16/5/94, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO
**Brolga** - 114, 16/5/94, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO
**Comb-crested Jacana** - 1, 18/3/94, near Argyle Diamond Mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) (southern limit of range in this area) - FO
**Painted Snipe** - 2, 10/4/94, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - JH, JF
**Eastern Curlew** - 350, 27/4/94, Bush Point, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO
**Pintail Snipe** - 1 banded and photographed, 23/4/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG
**Pectoral Sandpiper** - 2, 18/3/94, near Argyle Diamond Mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO
**Whiskered Tern** - 1000+ birds in early March, and 32 nests with eggs, 26/3/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO
**Common Tern** - 4, (1 in breeding plumage, with red bill with black tip, is presumably subspecies *hirundo* from the Atlantic), 10/6/94, Broome jetty (Broome) - GS * 400, April 94 (apparently the eastern subspecies *longipennis* with black bills).(Broome)- GS
**Rufous Owl** - 1, Surveyor's Pool, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - GS
**Fork-tailed Swift** - 3000+, 18/2/94, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO
**Collared Kingfisher** - 1, 24/1/94, Crab Creek, Broome (Broome) - GMo
**Tree Martin** - 100+ each morning, moving north, 4-9/4/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG
**Yellow Wagtail** - 26, including a number of males in breeding plumage, 17/4/94, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) (probably subspecies *simillima*) (apparently the highest number recorded in Broome) - GS
**White-browed Robin** - 1, riverine thicket near Mitchell River Falls, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - GS
**Little Grassbird** - 1, 31/1/94, Lake Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) (this appears to be a small isolated population) - GMo
**Purple-crowned Fairy-wren** - 3, 24/7/93, Miners Pool, Drysdale River Crossing, Gibb River Road (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - GS
**White-winged Fairy-wren** - 15-20 (6 banded), 5/4/94 Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG (at or near northern limits of range in this area)
**Black-tailed Treecreeper** - 1 immature, 16/5/94, Lake Campion, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (near southern limit in the Kimberley)
**Black Honeyeater** - 1 male (banded), Mar-Apr 94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO, AWSG (near northern limit of range)
**Pied Honeyeater** - 3 (1 male banded), 23/3/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO, AWSG
**Orange Chat** - 8, 23/3/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO
**Painted Firetail** - 10, 7/3/94, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - BBO * 2, 27/4/94, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) (near northern limit of range) - BBO

## Observer Codes

| | |
|---|---|
| AB = Allan Burbidge | JH = Jack Hunt |
| AR = Allan Rose | JN = Jane Newsome |
| ANSG = Australian Wader Study Group | JR = Julie Raines |
| BB = Bruce Buchanan | MB = Mary Brenner |
| BBO = Broome Bird Obs | |
| BM = Bill McRoberts | MBy = Max Bailey |
| BN = Brenda Newbey | McA = Marie Casley |
| BS = Bev Standring | MJB = Mike Bamford |
| BW = Brian Wilson | MM = Marion Massam |
| DN = David Newsome | MMa = Mike Mahoney |
| FO = Frank O'Connor | PC = Peter Collins |
| GL = Graham Little | PH = Peal Howden |
| GMo = Glenn Moore | PS = Peter Sandilands |
| HC = Helen Clark | RP = RossPayton |
| HvW = Hank van Wees | RS = Rod Smith |
| IS = Ian Standring | SN = Simon Nevill |
| JB = John Blyth | SR = Sandy Rose |
| JuB = Judy Blyth | TK = Tony Kirkby |
| JF = Jon Fallaw | TV = Tony Vigilante |

The Observer Codes for WABN No. 69 of March 1994 were inadvertently omitted. Apologies. Ed. Herewith :—

| | |
|---|---|
| AB = Allan Burbidge | JH = Jack Hunt |
| AS = Angela Sanders | JR = Julie Raines |
| BB = Bruce Buchanan | JS = John Start |
| BBa = Bryan Barrett | KC = Kevin Coate |
| BBO = Broome Bird Obs | KL = KC Lim |
| BN = Brenda Newbey | KN = Klaus Niemela |
| CD = Colin Davis | LS = Leon Silvester |
| DC = Doug Coughran | MJB = Mike Bamford |
| FO = Frank O'Connor | MBy = Max Bailey |
| GM = George Miller | MC = Margery Clegg |
| GL = Graham Little | MCr = Michael Craig |
| GS = George Swann | ND = Norma Duff |
| HS = Helen Start | PBT = Peregrine Bird Tours |
| HvW = Hank van Wees | RD = Ray Downes |
| IL = Ingrid Little | TJ = Tom Jeffcote |
| JuB = Judy Blyth | |
| JB = John Blyth | TS = Trevor Stoneham |

## GOULD LEAGUE CAMP

Expressions of interest are invited from 11 year old students from all schools who have a genuine interest in Natural History. Spend 12 days in the richly endowed Bickley Valley studying all aspects of wildlife and the environment as part of schoolwork.

Telephone the WA Gould League (09) 387 6079 at Herdsman Lake for details — do not delay — places are limited

# Hooded Plover Project — new for WA

The Hooded Plover has been thought to be classified as *Charadrius rubricollis*. Marchant and Higgins (1993) have classified it as *Thinornis rubicollis* as being allied with the very rare Shore Plover *Thinornis novaeseelandiae* of the Chatham Islands.

The Hooded Plover is categorised as rare and in some states there has been a clear decline in numbers. In WA no survey of numbers for this species has been carried out and insufficient is known to make a reliable estimate of the numbers here. The species is particularly interesting in WA because, unlike their eastern counterparts which are rarely more than 500 metres from the coast-line, in WA some of the population breeds hundreds of kilometres inland, on the edges of salt lakes. It appears that many of these inland breeding birds move close to the coast after breeding and can aggregate in sizeable flocks in estuaries and on near-coastal lakes. In WA Hooded Plovers have been recorded coastally from Shark Bay to Eyre Bird Observatory and inland as far as Menzies.

How many Hooded Plovers are there in WA? This is the primary question we are hoping to begin to answer. It is also hoped we shall find out more about where and when they breed, their ecological requirements, pattern of movement and problems with disturbance.

The Project

The project has been initated by the WA Group because of the lack of information about this species, the vast area sparsely occupied by Hooded Plovers and also because there is no other project of the nature for WA members at present.

Co-incidently but fortunately, Mike Weston of the RAOU and the Australasian Wader Studies Group, is planning to undertake a a Ph.D on Hooded Plovers in WA next year. He will analyze the data. Our efforts will assist him to make a more comprehensive and useful study. Funding for postage, printing, and administrative phone calls for the WA Group Hooded Plover Survey will initially come from our reserves, but sources of outside funding will be sought.

The project will commence in June 1994 (now) and run until June 1995 (inclusive). It will consist of:

(i) records made on an incidental basis throughout the survey period

(ii) a co-ordinated count in February 1995

Records should fit into this June to June time-slot. Earlier records are not required at this stage. A newsheet will be sent to contributors each quarter. Incidental records should be recorded on the observation forms supplied which will be sent as required, though it is hoped that some observers will use photocopies. It is a one-year-only project so do what you can towards tracking down the Hooded Plovers of the west in this time.

Background

In 1987, the RAOU published a Conservation Statement (Schulz and Bamford, 1987) on the Hooded Plover, as the species appeared to be declining in NSW, Victoria and South Australia. The status of the Hooded Plover in WA was not known when the report was written and no detailed survey work has been done here since. Garnett (1992) in *Threatened and Extinct Birds of Australia* classes the Hooded Plover as rare because current estimates are that the entire world population does not exceed 10 000 and may be as low as 5000.

Identification

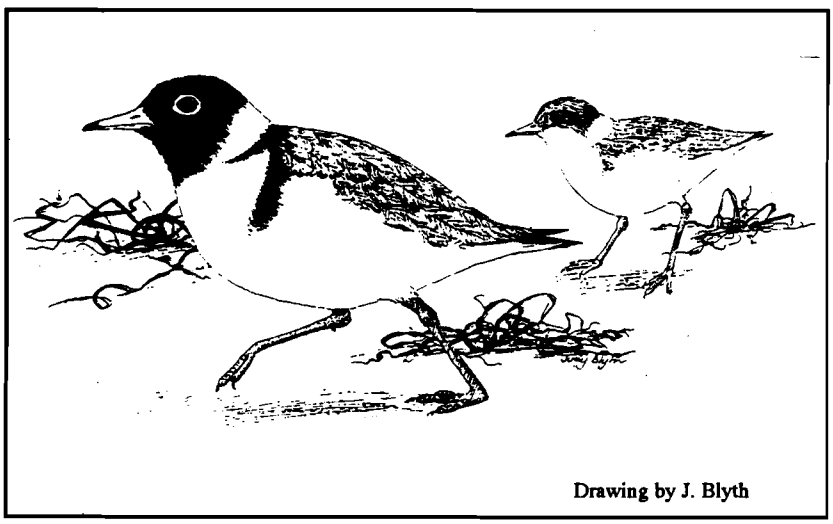
The Hooded Plover is sturdy, almost neckless, with short, pale orange legs and it has a near-horizontal stance. The white band across the back of the neck is a major definitive feature of both the adult and the juvenile. (see illustration). Although the adult plumage of black, white and sandy-grey combined with the black-tipped red beak, red eye-ring and pale orange legs appears eye-catching in the field guides, it is very easy to overlook Hooded Plovers.

They often stand with their back to an observer before moving away inconspicuously or they will stand motionless behind a scrap of seaweed or among stones of a similar colour to their backs.

If a white neck band is seen, there should be no confusion with other species except with the very rarely seen (in WA) Little Ringed Plover. The broad wingbar, lack of a breast-bar, larger size, paler colour, should clearly differentiate the juveniles of these two species; the adults are less easily confused.

Habitat & Nesting

Hooded Plovers are usually found on wide bare shores where there appears to be little cover or vegetation. They also use primary dunes. Occasionally they have been recorded at inland freshwater seepages.

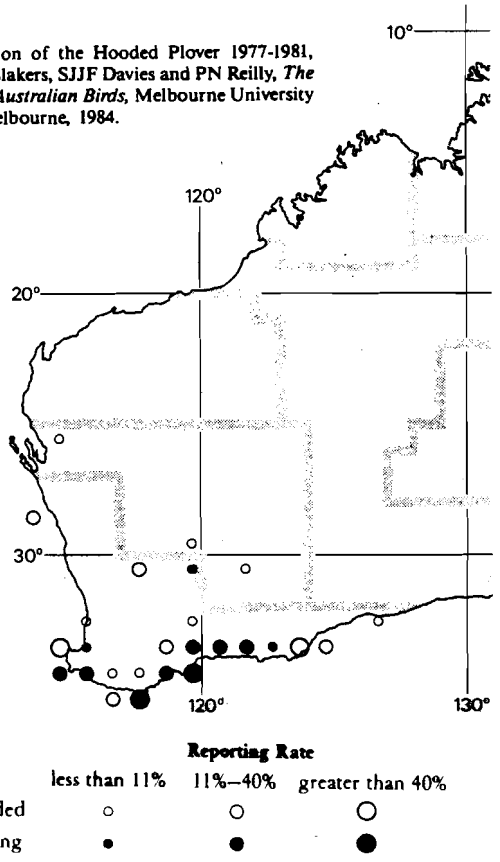


Drawing by J. Blyth

Hooded Plovers nest on the beach, among dunes, on the edge of inland lakes and on rocky outcrops within salt lakes, between August and March. The decline of populations in eastern Australia is considered to be mainly due to disturbance while nesting. They have a 30 day incubation, the young do not fly for three weeks and have been seen to shelter in wheel ruts. Nests are very likely to be run over or stepped on and can readily be destroyed by dogs.

There is no information about their foraging habits and food in WA.

To help you decide general search areas, the WA part of the distribution of Hooded Plovers from *The Atlas of Australian Birds* (survey period 1977 to 1981 inclusive) is shown and the following list brings together the records which appeared in WA Bird Notes from 1987 to 1989.




Distribution of the Hooded Plover 1977-1981, from M Blakers, SJJF Davies and PN Reilly, *The Atlas of Australian Birds*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1984.

| Year | Date | Location | No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1987 | 14/3 | Lake Preston (Mandurah) | 87 |
| | 16/3 | White Lake (Esperance) | 140 |
| | 18/4 | Football Lake (Gingin) | 1 |
| | 18/4 | Forrestdale Lake (Forrestdale) | 1 |
| | 12/5 | Lake Clifton (Mandurah) | 2 |
| | 29/8 | Graveyard Swamp (Gingin) | 1 |
| | 1/10 | Stirling Range National Park | 2 |
| | 29/10 | Lake Clifton (Mandurah) | 5 |
| | 13/12 | Nornalup Inlet (Walpole) | 4 |
| 1988 | 2/1 | Ocean Beach (Denmark) | 2 |
| | 9/4 | Lake Warden (Esperance) | 539 |
| | 23/4 | Gracetown (Margaret River) | 4 |
| | 1/10 | Karbul (Esperance) | 260 |
| | 18/11 | Lake Preston (Mandurah) | 6 |
| | 20/11 | Benje Benjenup Swamp (Esperance) | 50 |
| | 20/11 | Two Mile Lake (Stirling Range NP) | 4 |
| | 10/12 | Ned's Corner (Munglinup) | 103 |
| | 10/12 | Alfred Cove (Melville) | 1 |
| 1989 | 12/1 | Cosy Corner (Augusta) | 3 |
| | 20/1 | Bodey's Swamp (Wannamal) | 1 |
| | 7/2 | Dunn Rock NR (Lake Grace) | 75 |
| | 19/2 | Mouth of Margaret River | 2 |
| | 26/2 | Baghdad Lake (Rottnest) | 3 |
| | 11/3 | Station Lake (Esperance) | 91 |
| | 30/3 | Lake Gore (Esperance) | 273 |
| | 26/10 | Dunn Rock NR (Lake Grace) | 104 |

**B. Newbey**

References:

Garnett S, (ed) (1992) *Threatened and Extinct Birds of Australia*. RAOU Report 82, RAOU & ANPWS.

Marchant S & Higgins PJ (eds) (1993) *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume 2 Raptors to Lapwings*, Oxford University Press, Australia.

Schulz M & Bamford M (1987) *The Hooded Plover*, RAOU Conservation Statement, RAOU Report 35.

# Members Contributions

## MAXIMISING BREEDING SUCCESS ?

Bird behaviour is essentially explained by attributing it to efforts to maximise reproductive success, known as natural selection. This theory is termed parsimonious by scientists, that is, it is a theory simple in itself which explains a great deal. Scientists generally accept that the more parsimonious, the greater the probability of a theory being correct. On this basis natural selection is a powerful explanatory theory and it is no wonder that it has dominated thinking for so long.

Many examples are cited in the literature of the accuracy of the natural selection theory. One interesting example recently quoted by Dr Michael Brooke of the University of Cambridge is the growth of the bill of the Medium Ground Finch in the Galapagos during a prolonged two year drought. A seed eating species, usually eating small seeds, these became exhausted in the dry period and with only large seeds left, the birds with bigger bills survived while those with smaller bills perished. On average bills were 4% larger after the drought. When the weather later resumed a normal pattern and smaller seeds became available once more, the bill size declined to the pre-drought pattern.

Karl Popper with his famous Black Swan analogy, has pointed out that the gathering of more and more supportive evidence does not give any theory greater validity. Popper realised that (in Europe) a theory that 'all swans are white' is not made the more certain by exhaustive surveys of all swans virtually world wide, which would show that indeed all swans are white. A single exception disproves the 'all swans are white' statement and a visit to Australia is all that is needed. In Popper's view, the advancement of scientific truth is not through the gathering of more and more positive evidence, but by the seeking a single negative example. If found, a theory needs modification or rejection, if not found the theory is possibly correct. This philosophic idea has had profound effects in scientific and other areas of life.

The theory of natural selection therefore does not need more evidence, of which there is plenty, but examples which disprove, or do not fit. Rowley in his fine work on the Galah writes that "fast flying with frequent changes of direction could be categorized as play" (p 35) and of acrobatics which "to call this play does not help explain why adults and young birds

behave in this seemingly pointless way" (p 42.) It is difficult to resist a conclusion, while Rowley is careful not to say so, that the behaviour to which he refers is not readily explained by the natural selection-maximise reproductive success theory — although of course with a little ingenuity such Galah behaviour can be made to accord with it. (One of the problems with a good theory is that much effort is often used to make difficult data fit rather than modify the theory.) Similar fast flying was observed by myself in young and adult Collared Sparrowhawks (see WABN 53, March 1990 p7) which I attributed to 'exercise'. It may well have been play.

There are many examples of wild birds having been reared or befriended by humans returning to their human friends over a number of years. (eg see book mention WABN 38 p10), often bringing their young brood for inspection? approval? behaviour which only very distantly if at all fits natural selection.

Recently (May) I was surprised to hear four very loud calls from a Western Spinebill just outside my window. A number of Western Spinebills have been in the garden for some months (particularly attracted to flowering *Grevillea tenuiloba* — a ground cover). On investigating I saw a male Western Spinebill standing on my verandah close to the window and a few millimetres from a female spinebill which was lying injured, evidently by having flown into the window. (These distressing collisions have occurred almost daily in the last two months with one or other species and keeping the curtains closed, which seems to reduce the collisions is not always practical.)

I picked up the injured bird and held it in my hand. After a few minutes I gave some water, having found that birds so injured pant heavily and seem to benefit by a little water. Later when it appeared capable of perching, I placed the injured female spinebill in a shrub close to the *G. tenuiloba*, where it simply hung on alternately opening and closing its eyes, apparently dazed or injured.

After a while a male Western Spinebill approached the base of the shrub and called twice loudly — the same call as earlier had drawn my attention. A little later the male flew into the shrub where the injured female clung and called again, with a soft burbling call. With the coming of darkness I was not able to see more, although the female was seen to fly a short distance.

Of course, the male Western Spinebill was well aware that paired birds who are used to each other have a much higher incidence of breeding success and the male Western Spinebill was simply endeavouring to maintain a favourable breeding opportunity. Or was it ?

**B. Buchanan**

References:

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## SWIFT FLIGHT

The Fork-tailed Swift is an infrequent visitor to the South West of Western Australia during summer. They follow low pressure systems that move down the West Coast and through the inland.

On the 13 March 1994 an estimated 50—80 Fork-tailed Swifts were seen hawking very low over coastal vegetation at Poison Creek in the Cape Arid National Park. Hundreds were seen at the Esperance townsite on 19 March 1994, at Cape Le Grand National Park on 20 and 21 March and near Grass Patch (787 kilometres north of Esperance) on 22 March 1994. Weather conditions during all sightings was hot and humid.

A count of Fork-tailed Swifts was undertaken during the 20 March 1994 sighting at Cape Le Grand National Park.

At 1620 hours from the front verandah of our house at the Park I observed Fork-tailed Swifts flying to the North-East.

I sat, facing east and commenced counting the swifts as they passed an imaginary line perpendicular to the horizon. The area of the sky counted represented one quarter of the visible sky. Fork-tailed Swifts were seen in all quarters.

In the 35 minutes from 1620 hours, 401 Fork-tailed Swifts passed the 'imaginary line', flying in one direction only, from the South-West to North-East. At 1655 hours I ceased counting as the swifts were then circling with no definite flight direction.

At 1710 hours the Fork-tailed Swifts resumed their directional flight, but in the opposite direction, from the North East to the South West. At 1901 hours the swifts changed again to the opposite direction, flying from the West South-West to the East North-East. Few swifts flew in this new direction. During the 51 minutes from 1710 hours, 443 Fork-tailed Swifts flew past the 'imaginary line'.

Assuming that Fork-tailed Swifts flew past the other three quarters of the sky in the same numbers and at the same times, then a total of 1604 Fork-tailed Swifts flew from the South-West to the North-East between 1620 hours and 1655 hours and 1772 flew from the North-East to the South-West between 1710 and 1801 hours.

**A. Rose**

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## Notes For Contributors

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**Deadline for the September Issue**
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