



Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 71 September 1994

For your Kimberley visiting list — Lake Gladstone

Lake Gladstone is in the south central Kimberley on Mt House Station. It is some 75km from the homestead over reasonable road (in the dry).

The Lake, formed in a shallow depression, is apparently permanent water. Visited in August, it was about 1 metre deep at the maximum. An irregular shape, some 500 metres by 300 metres in size when visited, with a 50 metre arm to the south east, the lake is obviously very much larger in the wet and over two metres deep.

The roads shown on the 1:250000 map sheet (1974 edition) as surrounding the Lake no longer exist, but with a little persistence the Lake may be found.

After driving 70+ km across dusty acacia scrub country, the appearance of a large body of water comes as a welcome surprise, even though marked on the map (and in the *Travellers Atlas*).

In August there were sizeable patches of open water, but the greater part comprised 'rush' — like *Baumea articulata* without the 'joints', most fallen and broken. In the wet, areas of open water would predominate.

While enjoying the scene it was crowned for me by the appearance of a majestic White-bellied Sea-Eagle (a detestable name for so majestic a bird) which was promptly attacked/harassed by two Whistling Kites. The Lake is 170 km from Walcott Inlet and 240 km from the West Arm at Wyndham. There is a Whistling Kite nest on the eastern side of the Lake, with every sign of being of several years standing.

It would appear that there have not been many ornithological visits to Lake Gladstone as in the short time available during one afternoon and without a thorough survey, 27 species were observed which were not recorded in the appropriate 10 Block of the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (1984). (I should add that Storr GM (1980) mentions Lake Gladstone specifically in relation to 8 water bird species, two of which — Wandering Whistling-Duck and Green Pygmy-Goose, were not seen in August).

Those water birds, with the numbers recorded, not shown as being in the specific *Atlas* (1984) Block were: —

Australian Grebe — 12, Australian Pelican — 7, Little Black Cormorant — 10, Cattle Egret — 1, Intermediate Egret — 15, Glossy Ibis — 6, Australian White Ibis — 3, Straw-necked Ibis — 6, Royal Spoonbill — 2, Yellow-billed Spoonbill — 2, Magpie Goose — 37, Plumed Whistling Duck — 1000+, Grey Teal — 6, Pink-eared Duck — 1, Hardhead — 14, White-bellied Sea-Eagle — 1, Marsh Harrier — 1, Purple Swampphen — 2, Eurasian Coot — 9, Masked Lapwing — 4, Black-winged Stilt — 1, Wood Sandpiper — 2, Common Sandpiper — 1, Australian Pratincole — 1, Clamorous Reed-Warbler — 1.

Total: 25 water birds not in *The Atlas of Australian Birds* Block. In addition, other species seen and also absent from the *Atlas* were Spinifex Pigeon and Gouldian Finch, of which 5 juveniles were seen.

Other water birds noted (which are shown in the *Atlas* Block) were Great Egret (6), Pacific Heron (15), Little Pied Cormorant (4) and Black-fronted Plover (14).

The Pacific Heron were of two 'varieties'. Some were splendidly white of neck and dark of wing, such as are normally seen in the south-west, whereas others appeared to have had a blue-grey rinse, which noticeably affected the neck as well as other feathers. Similar members of the Pacific Heron 'blue rinse set' were seen elsewhere in the Kimberley.

The Lake also contains a very large and presumably old crocodile, seen clambering onto the bank among the Plumed Whistling-Duck, a Common Sandpiper, a Straw-necked Ibis and two Yellow-billed Spoonbill. The beast was some 2 metres+ in length with a very large body, making the crocodiles in the Hann River a short distance away look like tiddlers in contrast. The birds had to move to allow the newcomer to take up station, but seemed otherwise unmoved. I should not have felt so.

In the dry a non 4WD should reach the Lake, though care may be needed at dry creek crossings because of clearance.

Lake Gladstone should be on your list should you visit the Kimberley. Not only is it attractive to visit, but there is little like it in the southern Kimberley and nothing like it in the area in

which it is situated. In addition it is ornithologically interesting and information on the Lake is minimal.

As a bonus for the lonely grave enthusiasts, on an access track to the Lake (though not apparently the correct one) is a large horizontal stone cross beside a tree, apparently of stone not readily seen in the area.

B. Buchanan

Observations

Compiled by the Observations committee. Shires in brackets.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Grey-headed Albatross - 1, 23-25/6/94, Abrolhos Islands (Northampton) - JF, BF

Cape Petrel - 7, 7/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - GM

Kerguelen Petrel - 1, 15/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - MCr

Prion spp. - 6 birds of two species (from the Antarctic/Salvin's/Lesser Broad-billed/Slender-billed group), 15/7/94, Busselton jetty (Busselton) - MCr (note: prions can be difficult to distinguish even in the hand unless both age and sex are determined independently)

Streaked Shearwater - up to about 50, Apr-May 1994, Abrolhos Islands (Northampton) - JF, BF

Wedge-tailed Shearwater - 200+, 6/1/94, Halls Head (Murray) MCr

Little Pied Cormorant - 409, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

Cattle Egret - 2, 11/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa

Little Egret - 26, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) - MCr, GM * 1, 10/5/94, Lake Windabout (Esperance) - KD, PB * 1, 9/6/94, Lake Warden (Esperance) - KD, PB (rarely recorded in this part of the state) * 34, 7/8/94, Coodanup (Murray) - JB * 1, 10/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa (this species seems to be increasing in numbers in the south-west)

Australian White (Sacred) Ibis - 118, 26/6/94, Guildford (Swan) - JM

Peregrine Falcon - 2, 16/7/94, Udumung Reserve, Wannamal (Gingin) - BB * 1, 1/8/94, Mermaid Point, Waychinicup NP (Albany) - AB

Australian Kestrel - 2, March 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (scarce visitor to the islands) - JF, BF

Buff-banded Rail - 1, 13/6, 15/6 and 30/6/94, 10 km N of Cape Le Grande National Park (Esperance) (few records for this region) - SR

Purple Swamphen - 1, 27/7/94, Betts (Bodey) Swamp, Wannamal (Gingin) (apparently not previously recorded in the Wannamal wetlands) - BB

Banded Stilt - 9350, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for this site) - MCr, GM

Greenshank - 14, 10/8/94, Wonnerup Estuary (Busselton) - MBa (this number is unusual for this time of year)

Black-tailed Godwit - 49, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

Great Knot - 46, 2/7/94, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - TK

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - 2699, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray) (high number for the south-west) - MCr, GM

Red-necked Stint - 1829, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray)

References:

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

Storr GM (1980) *Birds of the Kimberley Division, Western Australia*, WA Museum Special Publication No. 11, Perth.

Travellers Atlas of Western Australia, (1986) 3rd Edition, DOLA, WA.

(possibly the highest number recorded for this site) - MCr, GM
Curllew Sandpiper - 1562, 28/12/93, Lake McLarty (Murray)

(high number for this site) - MCr, GM

Sanderling - 17, 29/12/93, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - MCr, GM

Red-necked Phalarope - 1, 30/7/94, Pearce's Lake, Rottne (Rottne Island) - PC

Silver Gull - 1122, 28/12/93, Creery Marshes (Murray) (high number for this site) - MCr, GM

Common Tern - 16, 14/1/94, Mandurah Boat Harbour (Murray) - MCr

Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo - 4, 27/7/94, Bungendore Park (Armada-Kelmscott) - UE

Eastern Long-billed Corella - 20, 6/4/94, Manning Lake, Hamilton Hill (Cockburn) - CD * 26, 10/7/94, Manning Lake (Cockburn) - BBa, MC

Western Long-billed Corella - 250, 13/12/93, 3 km NW of Tonebridge (ManjimupD) - MCr

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo - 3, 5/1/94, Fifty Road, Baldvis (Rockingham) - MCr

Ground Parrot - 2, 4/8/94, Waychinicup National Park (E of Mr Manhpeaks) (Albany) - AN, JKR

Mulga Parrot - 6, 12/7/94, Barracca Nature Reserve (Chittering) (unusually far south for this species) - BB

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike - 2, June 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (scarce visitor to the islands) - JF, BF

White-breasted Robin - 1, 30/7/94, NW of Mermaid Pt and 4 km E of Waychinicup River mouth, Waychinicup NP (Albany) (occurs only patchily in this area) - AB

Golden Whistler - 1, (female or uncoloured male), 15/6, 12/7 and 1/8/94, Blue Gum Lake (Melville) - JBo

Willie Wagtail - 1, May 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (rare vagrant to the islands) - JF, BF

Rufous Songlark - 3 males and 1 female, 9/11/93, 30 km NE of Manjimup (Manjimup) (uncommon in the south-west forest block) - MCr

Brown Songlark - 1 female, apparently of this species, 9/11/93, 22km NNE of Manjimup (Manjimup) (uncommon in the south-west forest block) - MCr (note: female Brown Songlarks are very difficult to distinguish from Rufous Songlarks; detailed notes need to be taken on colour, shape and behaviour)

Red-winged Fairy-wren - 1 group of at least 2-3 birds, 2/8/94, NW of Mermaid Pt, Waychinicup NP (Albany) (occurs only patchily east of Two Peoples Bay) - AB

White-naped Honeyeater - 1, 3/6/94, Blue Gum Lake (Melville) - JBo * 3, 6/8/94, in garden at Kingsley (Wanneroo) - MBa (uncommon winter visitor to Swan Coastal Plain)

Australian Magpie-lark - 1, May 1994, North Island, Houtman Abrolhos (Northampton) (rare vagrant to the islands) - JF, BF

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

Great-billed Heron - 1, 20/5/94, Cape Keraudren (East Pilbara) (southern most record for this species) - KC

Pink-eared Duck - 2 with 6 young (half length), 30/4/94, "Lake Julia", 12 km E of Binthalya HS on Mooka Station (Carnarvon) - AB

Grey Falcon - 1, 19/5/94, Hales Well, N of Newman (East Pilbara) - KC

Inland Dotterel - 1, 29/5/94, Culi Lake, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC * 17, 29/5/94, Lake Tobin, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

Common Redshank - 2, 27/7/94, Pelican Point, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - AJ, RJ

Alexandra's Parrot - 45 in small groups, 30/5/94, between Wells 40 and 37, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

Budgerigar - flock of 2000, drinking at a pool, 6/94, just south of the De Grey River (East Pilbara) - SN

Mulga Parrot - 1, 17/6/94, Carawine Gorge, Oakover River (East Pilbara) - JM

Chiming Wedgebill - 1, 5/94, Well 41, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC * 20, feeding on the ground, 17/7/94, 75 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS

Banded Whiteface - 4, 24/6/94, Nallan Station (Cue) - SN

Rufous-crowned Emu-wren - 1 +, 19/4/94, 20 km W of Neale Junction Nature Reserve on Ann Beadell Hwy (Laverton) - KC

Rufous Treecreeper - 1, 19/4/94, Neale Junction, Great Victoria Desert (Laverton) - KC

Striated Grasswren - 1 +, 19/4/94, Neale Junction (Laverton) - KC

Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater - 1, 5/94, Well 37, Canning Stock Route (East Pilbara) - KC

Dusky Woodswallow - 200, 17/7/94, on Butcher's Track, 50 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS * 100, 17/7/94, 75 km E of the North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - RS

KIMBERLEY

Letter-winged Kite - 2, 31/7/94, Near Derby Sewage Works outfall (Derby-West Kimberley) - BB, GS

Grey Falcon - 1, 15/6/94, Charnley River crossing (Derby-West Kimberley) - SN

Red-capped Plover - 1039, 6/94, Eighty Mile Beach (Broome) - BBO

Partridge Pigeon - 1 +, 24/5/94, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Purple-crowned Fairy-wren - 6, 25/5/94, Drysdale River crossing, Gibb River Road (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Black Grasswren - 1 +, 24/5/94, Surveyor's Pool, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 22 in 2.5 km, 13/6/94, Backstein Gorge, Beverley Springs Station (Derby-West Kimberley) - SN

Black Honeyeater - 1, 16/6/94, Ellenbrae Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - SN

Yellow Chat - several birds plus 3 nests, 2 with 3 eggs each, 18/6/94, Parry Lagoons (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - SN

Gouldian Finch - 12, 23/5/94, 10 km S of Gibb River Road and Kalumburu Road junction (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 8, 3/6/94, Kangaroo Springs, Beverley Springs Station (Derby-

West Kimberley) - KC

ERRATA

Banded Stilt - 15000 (incorrectly 1500 in WABN 70), April 94, Cargills Salt Works, Port Hedland (Port Hedland) - AWSG
Gilbert's Whistler - 1 male, 3/4/94, Ryan's Find Road on track to Mt Walton, 13 km S of Jaurdi Station HS (Coolgardie) - HC, BM & RAOU Campout (locality incorrectly described in WABN 70)

Observer Codes

AB = Allan Burbidge	JKR = Jim Rolfe
AJ = Allan Jones	JM = John Malcom
AWSG = Australian Wader Study Group	KC = Kevin Coate
BB = Bruce Buchanan	KD = Kate Dawson
BBA = Bryan Barrett	MBa = Mike Bamford
BBO = Broome Bird Obs	MC = Margery Clegg
BF = Beth Fitzhardinge	MCR = Michael Craig
BM = Bill McRoberts	PB = Pam Burgess
CD = Colin Davis	PC = Peter Coyle
GM = Glen Moore	RJ = Rose Jones
GS = George Swann	RS = Rod Smith
HC = Helen Clark	SN = Simon Nevill
JB = Jeff Burrows	SR = Sandy Rose
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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
21 November 1994

Members Contributions

FEEDING REMINDER?

On the afternoon of 17th July, whilst visiting Woodman Point, we were able to watch an adult Roseate Tern in full breeding plumage, together with an immature bird.

Both were perched on adjacent rocks within some 30 metres of where we stood. The immature bird appeared to be unsuccessfully begging for food, from time to time giving a hoarse squawk. After a while it flew across to the adult bird's rock, grabbed it by the tail feathers and gave them a tug - but still without effect.

Later the immature bird flew off over the sea and was lost to sight for a while. The adult then appeared agitated and started calling. The younger bird returned before we left but we were unable to see whether it had caught a fish during its flight.

B. Barrett

SUBURBAN CATTLE EGRET

At 4 pm on Tuesday 10th May my attention was drawn to a 'large white bird' on the street verge in front of the next door neighbour's house. The bird, which I identified as a Cattle Egret, was moving rather nervously due to the number of vehicles using the street.

As I approached, it flew rather weakly to the other side of the street just missing oncoming traffic. With the help of a passer-by the bird was cornered and caught. I then took it to the relative quiet of the back garden where I examined it.

Nothing appeared to be broken and only a normal amount of feather wear was evident. However, it was very thin so I surmised that its weakness was due to lack of food.

I rang a number of groups and individuals for advice and Perry de Rebeira gave me the telephone number of the WA Native Bird Hospital where I took the bird for treatment. The bird fully recovered, was released on the 6th of July.

P. Sandilands

DRINKING IN THE KIMBERLEY

While camping by a dam on Kimberley Downs Station (and drinking a reviving first cup of coffee) I noticed a small group of Crested Pigeons near the water in a small tree. It was 6 am.

One of the pigeons flew down to drink. It was quickly followed by others, some 150+, hitherto unseen. After drinking a few moments all were gone.

During 20 days in the Kimberley I did not see more than two Crested Pigeon together at any one time and most sightings, themselves infrequent, were of single birds. It seems apparent the birds gather at a similar time daily for mutual protection while drinking, presumably from over a large area.

Such flocking for protection was apparent some 5 minutes later when some 2000+ Budgerigar 'appeared'. The flock flew round and round the dam area. After many passes and lower swoops, some portion of the flock, about 20%, dropped to the waters edge or into the water to drink, those choosing the in-water method keeping their wings beating all the while.

While drinking, the time of which was three seconds or less, the remainder of the airborne flock remained overhead. The brevity of the drinking periods was presumably deter-

mined by the time the aerial group could remain above the drinkers.

This pattern repeated itself over and over to an impressive sound of beating wings and calls. Much more time was spent circling in the air than in drinking.

After some 5 to 10 minutes smaller groups of Budgerigar could be seen to leave the main body and fly off, while new flocks, some of which were several hundred strong, flew to join the large aerial group over the dam. Each new group joined at the rear of the large circling flock. The interchange of groups, all accompanied by circling and quick drinking pauses continued for over thirty minutes. By 6.35 am the aerial flock could be seen to be diminishing in size and the flocks of Budgerigars joining were noticeably smaller and less frequent.

By 6.40 am the number of the aerial flock had diminished to some 200+. These remainder then settled in a group of small trees/large shrubs (from which the Crested Pigeons had come). Incoming flocks also alighted on the same trees presumably waiting until the numbers had built up to a safe critical mass, when all again commenced to circle the dam.

The sequence was interrupted by the appearance of a Black Falcon, one of which had been observed soaring above the dam two weeks before. The circling group of Budgerigars immediately ceased to call and flew to a clump of larger trees some 250 metres away from the dam where they settled.

The Black Falcon 'cruised' about, settled in a tree briefly, made a swift shallow swoop to catch a Zebra Finch (unsuccessfully) before leaving the area as suddenly as it had appeared.

While the Black Falcon dominated the dam area, the distant flock of Budgerigar had grown again to 800+ and on the falcon departure repeated the circling, drinking procedure. Abruptly, this final flock all departed at the same time.

Over a watching period of some 50 minutes in excess of 5000 Budgerigar must have attended at the dam. It seems unlikely all could have obtained a drink. It is to be supposed that those which required fluid obtained it while the others of the individual flocks flew with them in mutual defence.

A similar phenomenon, that of waiting in a tree until numbers had grown to be of critical size was observed, though with much smaller numbers, two days later on Dampier Downs Station at a bore, where the attendant raptor was a Brown Goshawk. Interestingly also, first at the bore in the morning were Crested Pigeon, again replaced on their departure by Budgerigar.

B. Buchanan

ONE TO REMEMBER

On July 5, led by George Swann, six members of the RAOU (two from NSW), visited a MRD roadside 'dam' between Broome and Derby. The 'dam', about 30 m from the road in a slight dip, has a few small bushes around it. It is surrounded by a grassland edged with trees on three sides. It held water in July.

On several occasions George had seen a Grey Falcon at the dam and had seen one take a Zebra Finch.

We waited for a Grey Falcon without success, although enjoying flocks of Zebra Finch, Budgerigar and Cockatiel which visited the water. A walk around the grassland area, dotted with trees, produced many birds including Black-tailed Treecreeper, Varied Sittella and Jacky Winter as well as a view, with a telescope, of a Brown Goshawk in a tree with its kill of Zebra Finch.

After a final scan of the trees, George and four of the group returned reluctantly to the Broome Bird Observatory. Before he left, George suggested that as we had our own vehicle it might be a good idea to wait longer as we were particularly keen to sight a Grey Falcon. This we did. We moved the car to the 'dam' side of the road to use as a hide.

After waiting a further time an Australian Hobby appeared, but it did not seem interested in the flocks of small birds. A Little Eagle was seen to take a Zebra Finch and not long after this a flock of Budgerigar flew up from the water. We had not noticed the approach of two birds, which came out of a stoop at great speed and flew over our heads. They were close enough to see the yellow cere and pale colour underneath. We watched them through binoculars fly across the road and disappear from sight, noting the light grey back and wings with dark tips. We were convinced these birds were Grey Falcon.

We settled down to wait as we were sure the 'falcons' would return to such a good food source.

While waiting a Little Eagle 'crashed' into a small leafless bush covered in Zebra Finch, though it made no catch. A few minutes later a Wedge-tailed Eagle settled on the ground near the bush.

At about 12 noon we saw two pale birds above the belt of trees flying swiftly through the trees, occasionally below the canopy — these were the falcons, we were sure.

To our great excitement the birds flew towards us and Allan was able to sight them with the telescope. Even with binoculars they were a great sight. They were Grey Falcon. All the diagnostic features were clearly seen. We watched them spiral upwards and upwards until we could no longer see them.

It was a morning we will long remember.

R. & A. Jones

POSSIBLE BAIRD'S SANDPIPER

On 6 February, 1994, about 1 pm, Frank O'Connor and I went to Lake Cooloongup where we observed a wader which we did not recognise. Frank had binoculars and a telescope; I had binoculars (x10).

We were able to view the bird for about five minutes during which time it flew from about 30m away to about 50m away. Then it flew much further. The light was good; there was a strong westerly breeze. At first the bird was to the east of us, then to the south. The bird was with a group of about 10 Curlew Sandpipers and they were among a larger group of Red-necked Stints on a wide damp mudflat.

We both looked at the bird with binoculars and the telescope, then while Frank observed through the telescope, I wrote some notes, checking details from Frank:

Size — slightly smaller than Curlew Sandpiper, bigger than Red-necked Stint.

Bill — short, fine-ish, dark, straight.

Base of neck feathers — black. (This is the impression I got as the wind ruffled the feathers. Later Frank thought the neck was speckled.)

Breast — white.

Eye-line — none.

Wing colour — brown. Browner than Red-necked Stint or Curlew Sandpiper. (We discussed marking on the wing feathers but I wrote nothing down until later. We decided the wing feathers were not scalloped, nor spotted, not as smooth as a Curlew Sandpiper.)

Legs — darkish. (At first Frank said 'greenish legs', then 'darkish'.)

Behaviour — inclined to jump into the air, into the wind. Fast movements, hyperactive style.

This is all that was written at the time; The bird flew once, we observed it again for a short time, then it flew out of sight, both times with the Curlew Sandpipers although it had been behaving differently to them most of the time. Despite walking further and searching as we returned the bird was not seen again.

Later I asked, "Do you think the bill was as long as the head?" Frank said, "Definitely shorter. It seemed about half the length of a Curlew Sandpiper bill".

At home I tried to find an illustration of the plumage in *Shorebirds* for which we had not found the words. The closest match, showing dark centres to the feathers, was a Baird's Sandpiper. Although we did not note the comparative wing/tail length or any circular movement of the tail while feeding, all of our observations except the straight bill seemed to fit that species and the bill was at the time being compared to those of Curlew Sandpiper.

When I realized that the bird may have been a Baird's Sandpiper I made a note, additional to the above, that the bird tended to hold its neck vertically in relation to the ground.

B. Newbey

Reference: Hayman P, Marchant J, Prater T, (1986) *Shorebirds, An identification guide to waders of the world*. Croom Helm, London and Sydney.

LATE NESTING ROBIN

Although the Western Yellow Robin is a fairly common bird, little is known about its breeding biology. Storr (1991) gives the breeding season as mid-July until early December. On 10th January 1994 I discovered a nest of the species containing two eggs in jarrah forest 27.5km NE of Manjup. The eggs hatched on 22nd January and at the time of writing the chicks are growing rapidly. In addition I also observed a pair of Western Yellow Robin feeding young on 20th January in a nest about 500m from the first one.

Margery Clegg informed me that she had observed evidence of breeding in eight species at Cowaramup in mid-January this year. It will be interesting to determine whether the robins regularly breed this late in the area or whether this year is just unusually conducive to late breeding.

M. Craig

Reference: Storr GM (1991) *Birds of the South-West Division of Western Australia*, Records of the WA Museum, Supplement No 35, WA Museum.

Simpson K. & Day N. (1984) *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Lloyd O'Neill, Victoria and Beruldsen G. (1980) *A Field guide to Nests and Eggs of Australian Birds*, Rigby Publishers, Adelaide both give January as a breeding month for Western Yellow Robin. (Ed.)

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

Much of the current success of the WA Group is due to its large band of enthusiastic volunteers. They seem capable of trying and succeeding at anything you care to mention. Your elected committee, voted in each year at the AGM, are of course volunteers and it goes without saying they are essential for the viability of the group. But as well as these more 'significant' volunteers, there are a host of members who perform tasks which may seem ordinary, but which help to make the RAOU

such a good Group with which to be associated.

The office volunteers do a fine job each morning, five days a week, throughout the year, but do you know who they are? or how many?

There are at least twenty. Each morning Monday to Friday one office volunteer is rostered to be in our office in Perry House, a rather splendid National Heritage building at Perry Lakes.

All sorts of questions crop up on the telephone — from prospective members wanting information about bird outings or monthly meetings and persons wanting to know which book to buy, to requests for help in identifying a bird in a garden.

Some calls are from overseas or interstate visitors wanting to know the best birding spots and do we have anyone free or willing to take them out? There are those more adventurous people who actually arrive in person to see what goes on, to look at the books, videos, cards and items which are for sale or maybe have a cup of coffee and a chat. But the important thing to remember, is that it is office volunteers who perform this very worthwhile function of presenting the RAOU to the community in Western Australia.

We should raise our glasses to them.

M. Bailey

Notices

BIRD DISPLAY

The RAOU WA Group is steadily building up a series of thematic displays to be mounted in public places. The aim is to extend the joys of bird appreciation, knowledge and notions about their conservation, well beyond our RAOU membership. WABN No 70 June 1994 listed two displays:

1. Threatened Birds of Western Australia
2. How to Attract Birds to your Garden.

To these, the following have now been added:

3. Enraptured with Raptors
4. In Praise of Penguins
5. Parenting in the Bird World
6. Australia - A Paradise of Parrots.

More thematic displays will be developed in future.

In general, a "Birdwatching around ____" (local district around the library etc) display is mounted first, to whet viewers' appetites. Displays are prepared especially for each area. Any of the other above listed displays can then follow, hopefully helping to extend the general public's interest in the fascinating world of birds.

If you would like to see these displays in your area please contact your local librarian about the matter. If reception is good, ask them to contact Judy Blyth (our Education/Publicity person) to make arrangements — telephone (09) 381 6293.

EDUCATION MATERIAL WANTED

The Western Australian Museum has just opened a new bird gallery. We are in the process of collecting items for a 'hands-on' basket of bird items for visiting students to handle. We have a small number of bird nests, some taxidermied bird specimens and a tape of bird calls. I would like to add other items to the basket and I am hoping that readers of WABN may be able to help. we should like to receive: —

Nests of all types; *Bones* — we would very much like a big pelican bone or ones from an Emu, as well as small bird bones;

Skulls; Feathers. All of the material needs to be suitable for children to handle.

Finally, anyone who finds a dead bird in good condition is welcome to give it to us. The bird gallery has been made from donated specimens such as road kills or aviary specimens. This means not all species found on the Swan Coastal Plain are represented. Birds will be added as they become available. Please wrap the fresh birds in wet newspaper, place in a plastic bag and freeze.

All such items could be brought to RAOU meetings to be passed on or sent direct to Education Services, WA Museum.

M Turpin, Education Officer

WA GROUP LIBRARY

Members are invited to visit the Group Library and browse through the many reference books, field guides and reports. The latest acquisitions are Volumes 1 and 2 of *HANZAB*. There are also some good books and video cassettes available on loan and these in particular will assist new members in learning how to identify birds more easily.

Journals and newsletters are received regularly from various organisations involved in caring for the environment and those received recently are:-

Urban Bushland Strategy — draft plan

Dryandra Management Plan

Burrup Peninsula — planning exercise on proposed development including industrial zone

RAOU Conservation Notes — summary of the RAOU Scientific Day held recently in Adelaide

RGC Wetlands Centre, Capel - June 1994 Report and Catalogue of Technical Reports 1994

Fire Review Panel — Report March 1994 - review of CALM prescribed burning policy and practices and wildfire threat analysis

RAOU Conservation Notes No. 15 - concentrated mainly on wetlands

Broome Bird Observatory - minutes 27 June 1994, Wardens report June 1994 and July 1994 newsletter

World Heritage Newsletter - produced by CALM

Bold Park - land use strategy.

Further detail of Library acquisitions will be included in later editions of WABN.

Hooded Plover Project

This is the first report on the HPP. Members from 7 centres have responded to a call for District Co-ordinators. Reports of sightings are beginning to arrive at the RAOU office from throughout the target area.

Birdwatchers in two country areas have formed local groups for regular birdwatching outings as a result of the HPP. The number of such country groups is on the increase — a healthy sign for the RAOU.

The project depends entirely on the efforts of members regularly checking their areas and forwarding reports of sightings.

The reports will provide Mike Weston with the information to prepare a statement on the status of the Hooded Plover in Western Australia.

Do not hesitate to contact Phyllis Bentley and her team at the Office for any information or help.

A. Jones

Taxonomy re-visited

Taxonomy, used wisely, can be a source of information, interest and usefulness to all bird observers. Many RAOU members are interested in the relationships of Australian birds, both in terms of relationships between Australian species and relationships to species occurring in other countries. It therefore surprised us to see the point of view expressed by one member in the lead article of the last WABN (No 69).

We agree that it would be unwise and premature at this point to suddenly change to a system of classification based entirely on DNA-DNA hybridisation before such ideas were more fully tested using other DNA techniques as well as traditional morphological approaches. However, just because these new techniques provide new insights into bird relationships is not a reason to abandon such a useful system for one which is entirely arbitrary and subjective, ie by alphabetical ordering according to common name. One advantage of arrangement of field guides according to a classification with an evolutionary basis is that related, and therefore similar, birds are placed near each other. This assists not only in identification but also in understanding evolutionary and bio-geographic relationships. For example under an alphabetic system the Yellow White-eye and Silvereye would be well separated, thus hindering identification. Under any past, current or proposed system of 'natural' classification, these species would be placed close to each other. The suggestion that, within an alphabetic arrangement, 'groupings' such as cuckoos, kingfishers, etc could be used simply adds to confusion by introducing groups in an arbitrary (alphabetic) arrangement. How would it be determined which species were placed in each such group? Different opinions on this matter would result in different groupings. Would such decisions be based on accepted taxonomic relationships, and if so, what would be the advantage over the present system? Consideration of this question suggests that arbitrary groupings would add markedly to any existing confusion. The optimal solution is to use the best available information to get as close as possible to 'true' relationships. Inevitably, this will result in some changes as knowledge progresses, but such an approach will still contain more information and be more useful than an entirely arbitrary approach.

Books such as HANZAB are not field guides — they are designed to accurately and effectively communicate information about the known biology of the birds of a region, including information on their known or presumed relationships. They are therefore logically organised within a taxonomic framework. With respect to the better field guides, we see no evidence that there has been a 'tyrannical' use of taxonomy. Good field guides are designed to facilitate accurate identification in the field; at the same time, they can also communicate other information for those people (presumably the majority) whose interests go beyond simply putting a name on a bird or 'ticking' it on a list.

A. Burbidge & J. Blyth

B. Buchanan responds: The essential point of my article was to draw attention to the fact that taxonomy is not only subjective and arbitrary (admitted by its practitioners) but subject to continuous change. The Introduction to Emu Vol 77 Supplement May 1978 says "...it is theoretically possible to

devise a set of names for use throughout the English-speaking world that, once established by consensus, need not be changed" (my emphasis). The current system which renders references and field guides out of date every few years may be good for the publishers, but is frustrating and irritating for the majority of bird observers. I find it difficult to accept that the alphabet is "entirely arbitrary and subjective" while I recognised that "a strict alphabetical order ...might not always be the most convenient". I retain considerable doubt that taxonomic order is of much significance for the "majority".

Editors note: Other written and verbal comment received on the 'tyranny of taxonomy' favoured a reconsideration of the current taxonomic approach.

— and further follow-up —

CORELLA FLYWAY

No sooner had the piece on corella flyway been published in WABN No. 70 June 1994, than I observed two Little Corella flying north in July. The exception proving the rule? Usual southern passage has resumed (August).

MAXIMISING BREEDING SUCCESS

Doubts as to the universal applicability of natural selection to the explanation of bird behaviour must surely have been strengthened by the observation of Galah repeatedly sliding down a playground slide (see *Wingspan* No. 14 June 1994 p36).

B. Buchanan

B B C B Q

- 1) What weight of insects per hectare are taken annually by birds from healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 2) What proportion of the total insects present are taken by birds in healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 3) What percentage of birds are to found in open pasture in comparison with healthy eucalypt woodland ?
- 4) Are Malleefowl largely vegetarian or insectivorous ?
- 5) Why would you not study Malleefowl food intake by a study of their droppings or excretions ?
- 6) Have Malleefowl been recorded as significantly increasing in the SW of WA at any recent time ?
- 7) What is uncommon about the singing of paired Australian Magpie-larks ?
- 8) Is there evidence that birds sleep in flight ?
- 9) How many species of honeyeater (*Meliphagidae*) are in Australia ?
- 10) How many species of honeyeater (*Meliphagidae*) are known worldwide ?

Answers page 14

Excursion & Observatory Reports

BROOME

A course at BBO usually produces a species list of around 150. Our last course during August was no exception, with five participants (three West Australians, a New South Welshman and a lady from the UK) we enjoyed five days of excellent birding. The first stop was the Sewerage Works, to see such delights as Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpiper, Black-fronted Plover and two Square-tailed Kites. Then the Deepwater Jetty to watch the Brown Boobies cram onto the marker buoys and dive into shallow water for fish. In the coastal scrub close by, the Mistletoebird, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-winged Parrot, Grey-headed, Yellow-tinted and Black-chinned Honeyeater were amongst the flowering *Bauhinia*.

The next day we started some serious wader watching. We also completed a "recce" to determine where the waders were roosting for cannon netting the next day. This started with digging cannon holes at 7 am, carting keeping cages and other heavy equipment along the beach and finishing the final touches to the camouflage two hours later. Our cannon net catch at high tide was small, but course participants were fully involved, the moult cycle of the first year birds being easily recognised on Red-necked Stints and Red-capped Plover.

Day Four saw us heading up the coast to Broome's beautiful northern beaches. A wonderful surprise awaited us at Willie Creek, as not one, but three Letter-winged Kites were discovered roosting in a tree behind our morning-tea spot. For fifteen minutes we viewed them, convincing ourselves that they were not Black-shouldered Kites. There was no black eyemark extending behind the eye and quite a lot of grey in front of the wing and on the head of one of the perching birds. We then "twinkled" them from their tree, while six pairs of binoculars and one telescope were trained on their underwings as they flew.

On a later literature search these birds were found to be the 4th, 5th and 6th, Letterwing Kites recorded for the Broome area. Crossman in 1910 recorded them as numerous, but this seems highly doubtful when he did not mention the more common Black-shouldered Kite. One was spotted at Disaster Bay north of Broome on Cape Leveque by local birdwatcher Brian Kane in 1991. A dead bird was washed up at Crab Creek on 22/7 and whisked off to a freezer. It was then treated to a direct Ansett flight to Perth from where it was rushed to the West Australian Museum. The third report was sighted by a Victorian visitor to the Observatory, George Appleby, who spotted one near the Crab Creek mangroves. We have seen several others since, proving that this is a fairly major irruption. Unfortunately they will probably starve to death.

During the past 8 months we have sold 100 Broome Bird Observatory T shirts (with our distinctive Eastern Curlew logo), beautifully printed by WA Group members. We thank Rod Smith and all involved in printing and packaging these for us. Also of enormous help, were recent visitors, Allan and Rose Jones who helped compile the *Birding in Broome* brochure, Sandra and Austin Fincham brought up items for the shop and helped solve electrical problems and Graham Rhind helped with construction work. All were great company, contributing

to the birdlog every night and cannon netting during their stay.

Our new bus is proving to be a valuable asset and has already transported many a birdwatcher to and fro. For increased safety and communication, donations were sought to finance a two-way radio for the bus which would be compatible with our office base and mobile in the other vehicle. Our "Friends" group (over 130 members) were very forthcoming with funds. Despite the quote rising by \$100 and extra installation costs, we now have a new radio in the bus entirely paid for by donations. We and the Committee of Management are overwhelmed by the generosity of our Observatory members and grateful for their support.

Natural historians often harbour a great deal of useful and useless information and it was with this that BBO came second in the Shinju Matsuri 1994 Quiz night recently. As the RAOU Twitchathon is rapidly approaching we hope to equal or better this performance. With our birdlist growing to over 260 species, some forward planning and a fast four-wheel drive, we hope to be serious competition for other prospective teams. Good luck to all other twitchers on October 29th.

J. Fallaw & B. Hayward

EYRE

With *Eucalyptus diversifolia* (Soap Mallee), coming into flower along the dunes near the Observatory, a walk east or west will find the air full of the calls of honeyeaters, — Spiny-cheeked, Brown, Singing, Purple-gaped and New Holland. New Holland Honeyeaters are the most prolific species at present, with 260 recorded drinking at the bird baths one warm day of 28 degrees. The birds are selective in their feeding habits, as visits to some areas will find no New Holland Honeyeater, while other species such as Spiny-cheeked, may be present in large numbers. At the 9-mile, where *Eucalyptus leptophylla* (another of the 8-10 different Mallees in the area), is flowering, White-fronted Honeyeater are very numerous, but there are none around the house.

During the recent "Focus on Birds in Winter" Course, led by Peter Sandilands, Yellow-plumed Honeyeater were recorded at sites surveyed on the Hampton Tableland and at Burnabbie (about 10kms north-east), but not at the Observatory. Weebill were seen at all sites, except the most northerly on the Plain. Another interesting aspect was the greater than usual number of Chestnut Quail-thrush seen during the Course.

Mistletoebirds are in the area, feeding on the heavy crop of mistletoe berries and Yellow-rumped Pardalote can be seen throughout the Mallee. Several pardalote nests have been observed.

A check of some of the known Malleefowl mounds revealed three mounds being worked, with litter freshly scraped into them. At this time of the year, the mounds are being prepared in readiness for the hen to start laying.

During the "Malleefowl Studies" Course, starting 9th October, mounds will be visited and there is hope of seeing a bird working.

We look forward to the Flora Course in September, when we hope to find some of the rare orchids which have been recorded here. It will be hard to know whether to look up for birds or down for plants, - we'll always be frightened of missing something

From 2-15 October "Bird Banding" with Perry and Alma de Rebeira, will be held, running simultaneously with "Malleefowl Studies" in the second week.

From 4-10 December, "Field Techniques for Bird Study"

Course, led by Stephen Davies, will be held. Although this sounds technical, the ordinary birder is welcome and can gain much from it. Various methods of studying birds are tried, for example, simply sitting watching and noting everything birds do for behavioural study, or walking a transect line and recording all birds seen or heard at regular intervals in order to gauge the abundance of different species. Some bird banding is also done. There are still some vacancies for this course.

After a very dry June and July, good rain fell on the 30th July, 37.8mm. This was recorded as 'top of the State' on one TV channel, a surprising achievement for Eyre.

The rain was most appreciated and filled the tanks, damped down the sandy track and brightened up the bush and dune plantings.

Fewer visitors have been calling in over the winter months, — they must be all at Broome! However, this has given us a chance to catch up on some maintenance, such as replacing the glass in the office door. Thanks to Avanti Glass for donating the glass.

With Spring and the wildflower season approaching, things should start getting busy again soon. Eyre, in Spring is a delightful place to be.

G. & R. Watkins

BADGINGARRA 4-6 June

Fifteen people enjoyed this campout. A large portion of the Halse property has been left undisturbed bushland and much of the first day was spent there, admiring Red-capped Robin, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Variegated and White-winged Fairy-wren, White-browed Scrubwren and Inland, Western, Yellow-rumped and Chestnut-rumped Thornbill.

White-cheeked Honeyeater dominated the sparsely flowering dryandra and there were also many Tawny-crowned, Western Spinebill, Red Wattlebird, Singing and Brown Honeyeater were also feeding. Some lucky ones among us managed to see a Redthroat and Bill McRoberts and Dave Crossley were able to add White-breasted Robin to the Halse's birdlist for the property.

The farmland yielded occasional Stubble Quail and Richard's Pipit while a few Emu and Maned Duck appreciated the farm dam, as did smaller bushbirds who came to drink. Those of us who did not fall asleep too quickly the first night heard Southern Boobook and Australian Owlet-nightjar.

On the second day we explored nearby Watheroo National Park. On a wetland the water was bobbing with 6 species of duck and Black Swan, many Hoary-headed and a few Australasian Grebe and Eurasian Coot. A dead tree in the water provided a perch for Little Pied Cormorant. A small arm of associated wetland revealed a small flock of Red-necked Avocet.

From here, we drove to an area of tallish York Gum within the national park and had much pleasure in watching White-eared Honeyeater and Striated Pardalote. A small group of us observed about 50 of the pardalote flocking between two gums. Near the road another delight was two male Mistletoebird.

That evening, we were taken spotlighting — but apart from flushing two unidentified flying objects out of the heathland, we saw no birds.

The total number of species seen on the Halse property was 48 and for Watheroo National Park, 54. Overall, we saw 70 species during the weekend.

J. Blyth

KALAMUNDA 12 June

Some 17 people gathered in generally fine conditions at the point where Lockwood Road, Kalamunda is crossed by power lines and then walked along a roughly circular route through the forest back to their starting point. The route took them along the power lines strip and then through pole stands of jarrah and marri and across Hay Creek with luxuriant riparian vegetation under a canopy of blackbutts. Nearing the Mundaring Weir Road, the group walked through forest containing many she-oaks and along an old telephone line and track back to Lockwood Road. (In times gone by the telephone line and track must have served the fire lookout on Mount Gungin.)

Some 30 bird species were seen, heard or both. Among the more interesting ones encountered were Grey Currawongs (locally very much confined to parts of the forest away from human habitation), Spotted Pardalotes (usually scarce in this area but ubiquitous throughout most of the walk), a couple of Painted Button-quails (not met with in this area before), Red-winged Fairy-wrens, a Scarlet Robin (uncommon in this part of the forest), Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos (infrequent and in small numbers here), Rufous Treecreepers (confined to a small area of big timber in this part of the forest), a Western Yellow Robin (the first known to have been seen in the locality) and Western Rosellas. The large influx of Spotted Pardalotes was a remarkable event, the more so as not a single Striated Pardalote was found. Usually the latter species is encountered and the former not.

V. & J. Talbot

BIBRA LAKE 25 June

The heavy rains of the previous weeks had raised the water level in the Lake, so there was no longer a muddy foreshore to attract plovers and waders and the rains encouraged the duck population to disperse. A party of ten set off, determined to enjoy the sunshine, even if the bird population had temporarily declined and decided to walk a circuit of the Lake, including the decidedly suburban sector on the south-east.

The show opened well with a display by White-backed Swallows. Splendid Fairy-wrens were also in abundance and Western Gerygone showed themselves to allow study of their recognition features in detail.

A Whistling Kite patrolled the eastern shoreline conscientiously and a Little Eagle circled low over the housing estate and us as a reward for our determination.

In the unpromising area directly opposite the amusement park we had a detailed inspection of a Black-tailed Native-hen, two Clamorous Reed-Warblers at very close range, a Yellow-billed Spoonbill coming into breeding plumage and a bevy of White-naped Honeyeaters.

As at our last visit, the total bird population seemed low, but there was a good variety of species, our count being 53. We are very fortunate in the world of bird observers to have such a splendid area so easily accessible to capital city dwellers.

P. Anson

EYRE COURSE 10-16 July

Four people only because of late withdrawals, plus Eye Bird Observatory's Wardens enjoyed fine cool weather while recording species at ten sites located in the Nuytsland Nature Reserve between the Eyre Highway and the coast. Forty six species of birds, three species of mammals and one species of

reptile were identified.

The area covered includes flora from two of the four botanical provinces in Western Australia — the South-western Interzone and the Eremaean — which in turn brings a diversity of birdlife. Species from both the arid zone as well as more familiar ones from the south-west were identified.

The species seen at the most sites was Weebill, while the most numerous was the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater. Less common species sighted included Blue Bonnet, Ground Cuckoo-shrike, Chestnut Quail-thrush and Slender-billed Thornbill. Also, one morning, two Malleefowl were observed on an active mound near one of the sites.

The results of this course, when combined with those from future courses in the project (in different seasons) will give a clearer indication of the gradation of species due to landform and vegetation. Hope to see you there next time.

P. Sandilands

LAKE COOGEE 17 July

Dave and I were pleased to lead twenty three members around Lake Coogee. For many it was their first visit to the Lake.

Fifty eight species were recorded, seven of which were raptors. The most interesting sighting was undoubtedly a juvenile White-bellied Sea-Eagle circling overhead, our first for Lake Coogee. Five species were added to the bird list we have compiled over the last eighteen months for the Lake — total now 89.

J. Crossley

HERDSMAN LAKE 14 Aug

The highlights of the 6 to 7 km walk around Herdsman Lake were two separate sightings of Barn Owl. The first was disturbed from a roosting site in the young *Eucalyptus rudis* 'forest' between Jon Sanders Drive and the Lake; not far from the tennis courts. The owl flew quickly from sight but not before a first group of walkers had had a brief view of the distinctive face. John and Judy Blyth, the 'leaders', have watched the lake since 1985 and not seen a Barn Owl previously.

Continuing the walk (anti-clockwise) we were a short distance beyond the horse club when a cacophony of Singing Honeyeater alarm calls drew attention to the inner branches of a well grown melaleuca. The object of the honeyeaters' annoyance proved to be another Barn Owl, which was not inclined to move. This enabled a very satisfying look at this magnificent creature, admiring the complex pattern of the delicate colours and spots on its wings, its pale front with tiny random dark spots and of course its long pinkish bill and wide black eyes framed by its facial mask.

A flock of Chestnut-breasted Mannikin were feeding on the ground in a mown grass area further on. These attractive, but introduced finches seemed to have disappeared from Herdsman for a couple of years, but had been observed again over the previous two weeks.

Near Floreat Waters we saw Glossy Ibis, their wing plumage shining brilliant "oily" greens in the bright sunshine. Head, neck, shoulders and breast were a rich brown. Their facial markings were stunning too, with a thin white forehead band extending just over each eye and a shorter white band below each eye. White striations flecked the head — altogether a very handsome sight.

Spring was in the air, with a bobbing flotilla of fluffy

duckling belonging to a pair of shelduck. Pairs of Grey Fantail, Silvereye and Purple Swamphen were seen. Another swamphen was observed carrying a short section of brown reed in its bill. This it carefully deposited on its nest, watched by its mate who was already sitting on it.

An Australian Raven was also seen sitting on its nest. Welcome Swallow were gathering mud from the shore line.

Twenty people participated and the final checklist totalled 54 species.

J. Blyth

Albatross need Your Help

Today the Wandering Albatross and several other species and subspecies are confronted with probably the greatest threat to their survival in their long history.

The longline fishing industry has killed and continues to kill tens of thousands of albatross each year. It is proving to be an intractable problem because much of the longline effort occurs in the international waters and in the fishing zones of nations with little concern for seabird populations. It is very difficult to influence the longline industry to adopt measures that will reduce the albatross by-kill. More nations are entering the longline industry and existing fleets are expanding.

This can be understood when the value of a single Southern Bluefin Tuna can be \$50,000. Longliners will set 100km of line to catch 4 or 5 fish. It is not difficult for them to take a catch of \$1,000,000 value in one trip. Currently longliners set some 100,000,000 hooks annually in the southern hemisphere. The albatross by-kill is estimated at one bird each 1000 hooks set. This adds up to 100,000 albatrosses each year.

Unfortunately this kill rate is not evenly distributed across all species. The Wandering Albatross accounts for about 10,000 of these and the latest estimate of the world breeding population of this species is 21,200 pairs. They produce about 8000 chicks per year, about 30 percent of which survive to breeding age. These figures put the Wandering Albatross in terminal decline.

Other species, the Amsterdam (65 breeding pairs left), the Grey headed and Campbell Island Black-browed are all in trouble from this common cause. To combat the longliners we need knowledge of albatross distributions and food resources.

Food is the basic reason that albatross undertake their long migrations and foraging trips. Their diet is chiefly cephalopods, cuttlefish and squid. Cephalopods generally have a short life. They grow to maturity over two years, breed and die. All cuttlefish species and many squid float to the surface when they die and form a staple diet for many seabirds, including albatrosses. The biomass available to seabirds from this source is huge. A lot of it comes from Australian waters.

We urgently need greater knowledge. There are numerous ways of acquiring it, but most are expensive and unlikely to ever be seriously considered. Some satellite tracking work is underway but it costs \$5000 to track a single bird for 6 months, provided that its \$4000 transmitter does not fall off. It is not feasible to deploy transmitters on birds in large numbers unless you have a chance of getting them back. Birds in Australian waters are not easy to trap, so such technical results are likely to be limited. We need to use a number of strategies to acquire data in addition to high-tech methods such as satellite tracking. Some of these are simple but require a lot of labour, such as collecting remains from beaches.

In an attempt to estimate the biomass of cuttlefish in Australian waters, how it changes over time and its distribution, we have started a project that involves the humble cuttlebone. There are several cuttlefish species in Australia that die in varying numbers throughout the year, the source of the beach washed bones. If these can be collected, sorted into species, counted and measured (to determine sex), then a lot of information will be gleaned that we expect to be useful to the estimation of food resources available to albatrosses.

Many albatrosses are washed up on Australian beaches annually. Very few find their way into museums. If we could get a reasonable sample of these beach-washed birds from around Australia we could monitor distribution, relative abundance, changes over time, changes in population composition and population trends.

In an attempt to investigate both cuttlefish and albatross in this way we have approached the RAOU and asked for their assistance. They approved of our contacting those involved in the beach monitoring project and others interested.

This then is a request for your assistance. Beach monitoring participants are already contributing to our knowledge of seabirds. Please make a further contribution to our knowledge of albatross. In the longer term application of this knowledge will increase the probability of the survival of the Wandering Albatross and other species.

Dr C.C. Lu, of the Museum of Victoria and curator of Invertebrate Zoology, will be co co-ordinator of this study. Lu is a cephalopod specialist and has many years of experience with these animals. Lu has just completed a review of the *Sepiidae*, the family to which the cuttlefish belong, and he can therefore, among other things, identify cuttlefish with his eyes shut (well perhaps with one eye partly open). Naturally, his particular interest is cuttlefish biology and he expects that this study will contribute significantly to the knowledge of cuttlefish. This is also essential knowledge, because if we wish to maintain albatross populations then it is necessary to guarantee their food supplies. Cuttlefish have been and still are an unexploited resource in Australia as they are very nice to eat. This may not always be the case as Australia has many people of non-English speaking background with broader culinary tastes than Australians. Our study may make us better prepared to assess the effects of cuttlefish exploitation on seabirds if this eventuates.

The others (in addition to Lu) involved in this study are the NSW Albatross Study Group, with Harry Battam as study co-ordinator.

If you are happy to participate in these studies we will greatly value your contribution, keep you well informed of progress and results and regularly communicate.

Being long lived animals with a very low reproduction capacity, albatross populations studies are notorious for requiring lengthy periods of study time for trends to become apparent. Some aspects of the study, particularly distribution changes, may therefore take several years to produce definitive data.

If you are interested, in the first instance please contact Bryan Barrett via the RAOU office or direct to:—

Harry Battam, PO Box 142, Unanderra, NSW, 2526.

You will be contacted by the NSW Albatross Study Group with further details about procedures that we propose to use. We are open to ideas or suggestions that you may care to offer to improve the study in any way.

H. Battam

Coming Events

Thursday 15th September - Mid-week walk, Lake Claremont

Meet at 7.45 am at the southern end of Stirling Road, Claremont. To look at the waterbirds and bushbirds around this suburban lake.

Leader: Nora Brockman

Saturday 17th September - Full day excursion, Flynn Road

Meet at 8.00 am at the corner of Flynn Road and Great Eastern Highway, about 1 km on the Perth side of The Lakes turnoff (ie the York Road turnoff). A large area of predominantly wandoo wookland. We will look at several different areas where three species of robin breed and try to find the elusive Crested Shrike-tit which is sometimes seen.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Sunday 25th September - Full day excursion, Mokine Nature Reserve, Shire of Northam

Meet at 9.00 am at the corner of the Great Southern Highway (the York Road) and Wambyn Road - left hand side (approximately 30 km from The Lakes turnoff). Jim Masters will meet us here and lead us first to St Ronan's Well Nature Reserve and then to Mokine Nature Reserve, off Leaver Road. A round trip of approximately 200 km from Perth.

Leader: Jim Masters

Monday 26th September Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

Clive Napier, well known to members as a result of all the hard work he and Wendy have done for the RAOU, has been intrigued by the behaviour of otherwise wild birds which frequent places where people intentionally or unintentionally provide food for them. Most of us tend not to give much thought to such behaviour, but Clive thinks that it calls for investigation and will explain why.

Saturday 1st October to Monday 3rd October - Campout, Woodanilling

Ray Garstone has again agreed to show us areas around Woodanilling, which he knows well. A chance for those who have only heard about Ray's expertise at nest-finding to see for themselves.

Meet at the gravel pit at 8.00 am on Saturday and again at 12.00 noon on the same day.

Self-sufficient camping is available at a gravel pit 2 km beyond the town. Look for RAOU signs.

Camping sites are available at the sports ground - now a caravan park. It has only 4/5 powered sites - charge \$5.00 per van per night. Tent charges are \$2.00 per head. Booking recommended - contact the Shire Office on (098) 231506. If the office is closed there is a resident caretaker in the large caravan on site.

Leader: Ray Garstone

Sunday 9th October - Full day excursion, Jullimar Forest

Meet at 8.30 am at Bullsbrook where the Chittering Valley Road diverges to the right from the Great Northern Highway.

To avoid taking too many vehicles into the forest, it would help if people could 'double-up' and some cars be left at Bullsbrook. This is an interesting area of jarrah, marri and wandoo forest which should be very productive of both birds and wildflowers. We may look at Chittering Lake on the way home.

Leader: Clive Napier

Saturday 15th October - Full day excursion, Serpentine National Park

Meet at 8.30 am at the junction of the South West Highway and Falls Road (the turnoff to Serpentine Falls). A return visit to areas visited by RAOU members several years ago. A species list of 80 birds was compiled as a result of these visits.

Leader: Peter Anson

Monday 17th October - New Members Night, Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

An informal meeting for all new members, joining RAOU since September 1993 and all interested members, with short presentations on the background of RAOU and its aims, WA Group facilities, WA projects and activities, excursions programme, bird identification and monthly meetings.

Leaders: the Committee

Thursday 20th October - Mid-week walk, Lake Gwelup

Meet at 8.00 am at the carpark on the corner of Stoneham Street and Huntriss Road (north of Karrinyup Road). An opportunity for new and experienced members to see a variety of bush and waterbirds. Many birds should be nesting at this time and the lake usually has a large number of waterbirds on it.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Sunday 23rd October - Full day excursion, Austin Bay Nature Reserve, Peel Inlet

Meet at 9.00 am at the end of Beacham Road (formerly Grey's Road), the second turnoff on the right after crossing the Murray River, on the main Mandurah to Pinjarra Road (toward Pinjarra). It is 12.7 km from Mandurah on the Perth to Bunbury Road and 3.1 km east of the Murray River. The distance along Beacham Road (winding but follow your nose) from the Pinjarra Road to the meeting point is about 7km.

The Reserve combines estuarine waters and flats, coastal scrub, woodland and freshwater wetlands. We should find a variety of waders, bushbirds and waterbirds. Mosquitoes will probably be plentiful so cover up and bring plenty of insect repellent. Boots will probably be necessary.

A round trip from Perth of about 200 km.

Leaders: Judy & John Blyth

Monday 24th October Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

Dr Stuart Halse, of CALM's Woodvale Research Centre, will speak to us about Cape Barren Geese, which in this State occur only in small numbers on the islands of the Archipelago of the Recherche and the adjacent mainland and to some extent also about some of the other southern hemisphere geese such as Magpie Geese.

Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th October - Twitchathon

The RAOU will hold a Twitchathon among all its groups across Australia over the weekend of Oct 29-30. For the WA

Group, Twitchathon will start at 3.00 pm Saturday 29 October and finish at 3.00 pm Sunday 30 October followed by a BBQ from 5.30 pm on Sunday in the garden behind Perry House, to which bring your own tables, chairs, food and drink. Cooking facilities provided.

Begin now to form teams. Three prizes will be awarded. To the team seeing the greatest number of species (i) north of the Tropic of Capricorn (ii) south of the Tropic (iii) seen by a team of inexperienced birdwatchers (i.e. about a year's experience or less) anywhere in WA.

Teams should consist of three but not more than four members. At least three team members must see a bird for it to count. Birds heard but not seen do not count.

One member should keep a written list of species seen. Lists must be handed in at the BBQ to the organiser, Trevor Stoneham, who will adjudicate (feral and domestic species don't count, nor do emus in an emu farm). Teams unable to get to the BBQ should telephone the office - (09) 383 7749 after 5.00 pm 30 October 1994 and give their score.

Teams must register their involvement with Trevor Stoneham by Wednesday 26 October 1994, either through the RAOU office or his home telephone (09) 387 2467 and nominate a contact team member/telephone number.

Friday 4th to Sunday 6th November - Campout, Maxon Farm, Batalling (near Darkan).

This recently-renovated farmhouse, owned by CALM, serves as a field residence for wildlife researchers. Work on woylies, chuditch, numbats, and bandicoots is ongoing. There is no birdlist for the area so our visit will be an interesting and valuable one.

The house has 3 bedrooms (1 small and 2 large), 2 lounges with wood stoves, and a large kitchen with woodstove and microwave. There is electricity and solar hot-water showers. A two-room granny flat is also available.

Maxon Farm can be reached in two ways: From Collie: travel along the Collie Road approximately 50 kms east to Darkan, turn left into Farrell Road (watch for RAOU signs) and drive about 10 kms to Maxon Farm (you can't go any further). Alternatively: drive from Williams to Darkan, then turn into Farrell Road. (NB, there is a sign saying "Boolading Reserve" just before the turn-off into Farrell Road).

Cost is \$7.50 per person per night. Supply own food, cutlery, bed linen, and towels.

Leaders: Bill and Karen McRoberts. Book by phoning Bill or Karen on (09) 459 1971. Limit 20.

Sunday 13th November - Full day excursion, Brookton Highway Reserve

Meet at 8.00 am at the corner of Canning Mills Road and Brookton Highway, Karragullen, for a further 50-60 minute drive to the Reserve. Take care — the Brookton Highway is narrow and twisting with some black spots!

The Reserve has only been visited once previously by RAOU members on a cold, wet day. We look forward to better weather to view this attractive CALM reserve which has a variety of breakaway and parkland habitats containing a good mix of bushbirds.

Leader: John Ashford

Tuesday 15th November - Mid-week walk, Manning Lake, Spearwood

Meet at 8.00 am in the carpark, Azelia Road, opposite the Azelia Homestead Museum, on the western side of the Lake. A semi-permanent wetland with a fringe of paperbark trees noted for its waterbirds. Bushbirds are also plentiful in the reserve and in bush to the west.

Leaders: Gwen & Graham Goodreid

Saturday 19th November - Full day excursion, Hooded Plover Search, Lake Preston

Meet at 9.00 am at the first information bay along the Preston Beach Road, a right turn off the Old Coast Road, some 60 km south of Mandurah. We will search for Hooded Plover and other birds.

Leader: Frank Pridham

Saturday 3rd December - Full day excursion, Amarillo Pool, Baldvis

Meet at 8.30 am at the entrance to Amarillo Farm on the Serpentine River. Travel south on the Mandurah Road, turn left into Paganoni Road, (the turnoff to Marapana Deer Park) several kms before Mandurah. Amarillo Farm is on the right at the first bend in the road.

We will look for waders along the river mudflats and for the many bush and waterbirds of the area. Long trousers and boots/wellingtons are recommended as snakes have been seen here. Hats, insect repellent and water should be carried.

Leader: Jack Hunt

Wednesday 14th December - Mid-week walk, Alfred Cove

Meet at 8.00 am at the carpark in Troy Park (by the radio mast) off Burke Drive, Attadale. We will help new members and others to identify the many species of migratory waders which feed on the river mudflats. Telescopes would be useful. Wear suitable footwear for walking on the sandbanks.

Leader: Norma Duff

Sunday 18th December - Half day excursion, Grove Farm Reserve, Belmont

Meet at 7.30 am at the entrance to Parry Field Stadium, off Stoneham Street, Belmont. A good area, centrally placed, with a wide range of habitat, used in summer by many waterbirds and waders. Hats, long trousers and boots are advisable, as well as insect repellent.

Leader: Tom Delany

NO DECEMBER EVENING MEETING

Monday 23rd January Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

Jim Lane of CALM, who has worked on pelicans and other waterbirds for many years, will discuss aspects of the research he has recently been doing on Black Swans at the Vasse Estuary, Busselton. The Vasse is one of our most important coastal wetlands and members may recall that it yielded a record of Painted Snipe some years ago.

Monday 27th February Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

Allan Danks has been associated for a number of years with the very successful management programme for Noisy Scrub-birds at Two Peoples Bay east of Albany and will bring us news on current research, population trends, translocations and other matters relation to this State's best known threatened bird species.

Monday 27th March Meeting - Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, 8.00 pm

Dr Dennis Saunders of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology at Helena Valley has been involved in, among other activities, the preparation for publication of a bird atlas for the Wheatbelt and adjacent areas. People in the atlas area have been sending their records of birds observed locally (during the period beginning in June 1987 and ending in December 1990) to Dennis and he will be giving us a summary of the atlas results.

BOOKSHOP NEWS

1995 Calendars
have arrived.

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Courses at Eyre

Places are still available for courses at Eyre Bird Observatory. Details of the courses are given in the EBO Course Brochure, available from the RAOU (WA Group) office upon request.

Discovering Eyre's Flora (Andrew Brown)

11-17 Sept 94

Bird Banding (Perry & Alma deRebeira) 2-15 Oct 94

Malleefowl Studies (Rod Smith) 9-15 Oct 94

Field Techniques for Bird Study (Stephen Davies)

4-10 Dec 94

Christmas at Eyre 21-27 Dec 94

Star Gazing (Ralph Paramor) 1-7 Jan 95

Greening the Dunes (Rod Smith) 8-14 Jan 95

Going Batty on the Nullabor (Doug Watkins)

22-28 Jan 95

Birding for Beginners (George & Rita Watkins)

10-25 March 95

Focus on Birds in Autumn (Peter Sandilands)

16-22 April 95

Course fees are \$260 per week (\$20 discount for early payment). Bookings may be made by contacting the wardens at Eyre (090 393 450).



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Free Public Seminars

Saving Remnant Bushland

Dates: Sunday 25 September &
Sunday 23 October
9.30 am to 12.30 am
at the Goodale Sanctuary

Meet at 9.00 am at the Pinjarra Catchment Centre, SW Highway, central Pinjarra

Book by telephone 09 527 4289 or fax (09) 592 4843
by 16 September for 25th September seminar and 14 October for 23 October
seminar.

Morning tea provided.

ADMISSION FREE

BBCBQ Answers

- 1) 30 kilogrammes !
- 2) About 50%.
- 3) 5%.
- 4) Vegetarian.
- 5) It is not possible as Malleefowl only excrete dust.
- 6) Yes, "during the last three decades" (presumably being 1946 to 1976.)
- 7) They sing antiphonally or duet.
- 8) No.
- 9) 66 (39% of the world total).
- 10) 169.

Questions 1, 2 & 3 derive from Ford H, *Farm Birds*, Dept. Arts, Heritage & Environment (pamphlet), 4 & 5 from Rowley I (1975) *Bird Life* Collins Sydney p.143, 6 from Serventy DM & Whittell HM (1976) *Birds of Western Australia*, UWA Press Perth p. 180, 7 from Pizzey G & Doyle R (1980) *A Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*, Wm Collins Sydney p. 397, 8 & 10 from Brooke M & Birkhead T (eds) (1991) *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Ornithology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pages 146 & 169 and question 9 from *Emu* (1978) Vol 77 Supplement.