

# Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group  
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 76 December 1995

## Robins: Are They Declining?

The Australian Robins (family Petroicidae) are most closely related to the Honeyeaters (Meliphagidae), Pardalotes and Thornbills (Pardalotidae). Within Australia the family comprises eight genera and 20 species, of which 10 species from six genera are found in Western Australia (Christidis & Boles 1994, p.23). The robins seem to be seen less frequently than many bird species and this may be cause for concern. Their watch and pounce technique of feeding can make them less visible at times although their tendency to remain in a given area plus the marked colouration of some species can make them more noticeable. However, the Southern Scrub-robin does not fit into this category, being more of a ground feeder. As a group, they tend to retreat before the advance of civilisation and do not adapt well to changes in their environment. They are believed to be highly susceptible to the many and varied pesticides that are in common use throughout the State.

The records of robins used in this article are taken from the Database of Western Australian Birds and cover the nine year period 1/7/86 to 30/6/95. The species breakup of records in the database for this period is shown in Table 1. The 10 species together make up only 1.93% of the total database and provide a basis for future comparisons on the birds' status using frequency of observation at individual sites. It should be noted that the number of records shown for any particular location do not represent a measure of abundance, rather the number of times the observer(s) have recorded it at that site.

Scarlet Robin records in the database are mainly from the more heavily wooded areas of the south-west and range from Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park in the west to Jerramungup Shire in the east, and from Watheroo National Park in the north to Albany Shire in the south.

Atlas No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Records	Locations
377	Jacky Winter	<i>Microeca fascinans</i>	237	53
379	Lemon-bellied Flycatcher (incl. Kimberley subspecies)	<i>Microeca flavigaster</i>	25	5
380	Scarlet Robin	<i>Petroica multicolor</i>	695	108
381	Red-capped Robin	<i>Petroica goodenovii</i>	357	127
385	Hooded Robin	<i>Melanodryas cucullata</i>	139	48
394	Western Yellow Robin	<i>Eopsaltria griseogularis</i>	386	69
387	White-breasted Robin	<i>Eopsaltria georgiana</i>	213	49
388	Mangrove Robin	<i>Eopsaltria pulverulenta</i>	6	2
390	White-browed Robin	<i>Poecilodryas superciliosa</i>	9	2
441	Southern Scrub-robin	<i>Drymodes brunneopygia</i>	118	31
<b>Totals</b>			<b>2185</b>	<b>230</b>

Table 1 Records of robin species in the Database of WA Birds for the period 1/7/86 to 30/6/95



A young White-browed Robin

Location	Records	No. of Lists
Bibra Lake	1	55
Forrestdale Lake Nature Reserve	6	21
Kogolup Lake	1	5
Lake Joondalup	30	80
Pinnaroo Valley	9	12
Thomsons Lake Nature Reserve	2	21
Whiteman Park	1	4
Woodman Point	1	16
Woodvale Nature Reserve	1	1
Yangebup Lake	1	8
Yellagonga Regional Park	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>224</b>

**Table 2** Records of Scarlet Robins from the Perth metropolitan area.

There are two interesting outlying records from Mt. Gibson Station (Yalgoo Shire) ( J. & J. Blyth, 1/10/94) and Shark Bay Shire (George Agar, 11/7/91). As the more heavily wooded areas are reduced by clearance for farming, forestry and infrastructure uses, could we possibly see a reduction in the range of this species? A number of sightings have been in the Perth Metropolitan Area (Table 2) and tend to indicate that this species can still be found in the larger bushland remnants of the Swan Coastal Plain. Of the metropolitan locations, Pinnaroo Valley is the most promising place to see the Scarlet Robin, as it has been recorded there on 75% of visits. In contrast, it would appear to be only a casual visitor (recorded in only 1 out of 55 visits) to Bibra Lake. Whether it is declining or just moving away from the more settled areas needs to be ascertained, so any lists including sightings of this bird on the Swan Coastal Plain would be welcome additions to the database as would any records from outlying areas such as those mentioned earlier.

Where the forest has been thinned out and/or corridors are available for movement, it is possible that the Red-capped Robin will move from the drier inland into those areas favoured by the Scarlet Robin (Table 3).

Location	Records	No. of Lists
Augusta-Margaret River Shire	1	10
Bickley Brook	4	79
D'Entrecasteaux National Park	1	8
Helena Valley	3	3
Kalamunda National Park	1	29
Lake Muir Nature Reserve	2	3
Serpentine-Jarrahdale Shire	1	4
Stinton Cascades Nature Reserve	1	3
West Arthur Shire	1	4
Woodanilling Shire	5	6
Wungong Gorge	1	35
<b>Totals</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>184</b>

**Table 3** Records of Red-capped Robins in areas normally occupied by the Scarlet Robin.

Its presence on Rottnest Island (17 records) and occasional sightings from a number of other metropolitan and outer metropolitan sites (Table 4) indicate it is possible that it also used to be resident on the coastal plain. Database records show that the species still has a wide distribution in the less intensively farmed and/or settled areas of the State from Karijini National Park in the north to Stirling Range National Park in the south, and from Rottnest Island in the west to Nuytsland Nature Reserve in the east. There is one interesting outlying record from Broome Bird Observatory.

Location	Records	No. of Lists
Austin Bay Nature Reserve	2	7
Avon Valley National Park	3	10
Forrestdale Lake Nature Reserve	1	21
Lake Joondalup	2	80
Amarillo Pool	2	4
Pipidinny Road	2	54
Walyunga National Park	1	15
Whiteman Park	1	4
Yanchep National Park	1	8
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>203</b>

**Table 4** Records of Red-capped Robins from the Perth metropolitan area and outer metropolitan area.

The Hooded Robin may be less tolerant of change to its environment than the Red-capped Robin and seems to disappear quickly in front of man's activities. All the locations it has been recorded at have a sizeable area of natural or semi-natural vegetation remaining.

Table 5 lists the shires with their corresponding number of records in the database and illustrates that the Hooded Robin still appears to be widespread even if it is only sparsely recorded. There is one record from the outer metropolitan area at Pipidinny Road (B. Barrett 19/5/91). Other records close to Perth are listed in Table 6.

Shire	Records	Shire	Records
Ashburton	13	Kulin	1
Beverly	1	Lake Grace	2
Boulder	6	Leonora	2
Broome	2	Meekatharra	2
Carnamah	1	Menzies	11
Carnarvon	2	Mt. Magnet	2
Coolgardie	4	Mt. Marshall	1
Cuballing	17	Northampton	2
Cue	4	Perenjori	1
Dandaragan	4	Sandstone	1
Dumbleyung	1	Shark Bay	2
East Pilbara	1	Upper Gascoyne	1
Esperance	4	Yalgoo	2
Gnowangerup	3	Yilgarn	4
Jerramungup	3	York	1
Kondinin	1	<b>Total Records</b>	102

**Table 5** Records of Hooded Robins in shires outside the Perth metropolitan area and outer metropolitan area showing its widespread distribution.

Location	Records	No. of Lists
Amarillo Pool	1	31
Avon Valley National Park	3	10
Flynn Road Forest Reserve	32	41
<b>Totals</b>	36	82

**Table 6** Records of Hooded Robins close to the Perth metropolitan area and outer metropolitan area.

For the two robins found only in the north of the State there are not enough records in the Database to make any assessment of them. For the Mangrove Robin there are two records from Cape Keraudren and four from West Kimberley Shire. The White-browed Robin has three records from Kununurra Town and six from East Kimberley Shire. Checklists with either of these species recorded would be valuable additions to the database.

The White-breasted Robin is restricted (endemic) to Western Australia while the Western Yellow Robin occurs from south-western Western Australia to south-western South Australia. Both appear to be fairly sedentary, although it is possible that there is some seasonal movement within their ranges. Records within the database have the following distribution:

White-breasted Robin	north to south:	Geraldton City to Hardy Inlet
	west to east:	Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park to Waychinicup National Park
Western Yellow Robin	north to south:	Kalbarri National Park to Albany Shire
	west to east:	Boranup Management Priority Area to Nuytsland Nature Reserve

They are both found along the Darling Scarp and have been recorded at the locations shown in Table 7.

Location	White-breasted Robin	Western Yellow Robin	No. of Lists
Avon Valley National Park	-	4	10
Bungendore Park	1	11	18
John Forrest National Park	-	7	36
Kalamunda National Park	2	2	29
Mundaring Weir	-	1	1
Stinton Cascades NR1	3	3	
Stony Brook	4	45	109
Wungong Gorge	20	1	35
<b>Totals</b>	28	74	241

**Table 7** Records of White-breasted and Western Yellow Robins along the Darling Scarp.

No records have been received for the Swan Coastal Plain although the Western Yellow Robin is known to have been resident on it. Perhaps the White-breasted Robin was also?

The Southern Scrub-robin is probably the least tolerant of the family to changes to its environment. Like the Hooded Robin, all the locations it has been recorded at have a sizeable area of natural or semi-natural vegetation remaining. This is a very interesting species with relatively few records. Checklists that include it would be a most welcome addition to our knowledge of its current distribution. Database records for the species range from Kalbarri National Park in the north to Ravensthorpe Shire in the south, and from Dryandra Woodland in the west to Nuytsland Nature Reserve in the east.

The Jacky Winter is a species that can appear almost anywhere in the State where there is enough habitat to attract it, although it is not sighted often enough to be thought of as abundant. It has been recorded in locations as far apart as Argyle Diamond Mine, Mt Elvire State Forest, Rottne Island, Lake Toolibin Nature Reserve, Eyre Bird Observatory and Porongurup National Park. It has also been recorded at metropolitan sites.

The Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, like the Mangrove and White-browed Robins, has very few records. As more recordings are made in the north of the State, a clearer picture of it will probably emerge. The five locations it has been recorded at in the database are Broome Bird Observatory, Broome Shire, Derby Town, East Kimberley Shire, and West Kimberley Shire.

This article is intended to stimulate thought and discussion. It is not intended to be the definitive scientific answer to any of the issues raised and is used to show some of what can be gleaned from the information in the Database of Western Australian Birds. A future article is proposed on Bitterns.

Since mailing out the special newsletter to all WA members in winter, a number of new contributors have joined and are sending in checklists from their areas. The revised 'RAOU Checklist of Birds of WA' has now been put on hold until the research sub-committee decides what format it is to take. However, there are still a large number of the old checklists left and it is hoped that members will send more

checklists to the office to increase the information in the database. We are still looking for more members who are interested in collating and keying in data for this project – approximately one morning every three or four weeks. If you require details about this project, please write to or telephone the office and an instruction sheet and checklists will be sent to you.

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Project Co-ordinator, Database of Western Australian Birds

#### **Acknowledgment:**

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#### **References:**

Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F. & Reilly, P. 1984. *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. R.A.O.U. and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

Christidis, L. & Boles, W.E. 1994. *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. R.A.O.U. Monograph 2, Melbourne.

## Observations

Compiled by the Observations Committee. Shires are in brackets.

Names and order follow Christidis, L. and Boles, W. (1994) *The Taxonomy and Species of Birds of Australia and its Territories*. RAOU Monograph 2.

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

**Malleefowl** 1, 21/8/95, 50 km east of Merredin (Westonia) - KL \* 2, 28/10/95, 50 km south of Moorine Rock (Yilgarn) - RS

**Osprey** - 2, 6/9/95, near Garrett Road bridge, possibly nesting on power pylon (Bayswater) - DD

**Baillon's Crane** - 2, 29/9/95, about 3 km north of Muehea, in rehabilitated sand pit, in tall flooded grass on edge of open water (Chittering) - MBa

**Whimbrel** - 13, 21/10/95, Peel Inlet (Murray) - MS

**Eastern Curlew** - 3, 21/10/95, Boundary Island, Peel Inlet (Murray) - MS

**Common Greenshank** - 122, 17/9/95, Mandurah estuary (Murray) - MS

**Terek Sandpiper** - 1, 7/10/95, Alfred Cove (Melville) - KL \* 4, 21/10/95, Creery Island (Murray) \* 1, 22/10/95, Alfred Cove (Melville) - PS

**Red-necked Phalarope** - 3, 9-12/10/95, Government House Lake, Rottnest Island - PC \* 3, including a female in breeding plumage, 30/10/95, Government House Lake, Rottnest Island - JP, MC

**Elegant Parrot** - 1, 22/9/95, 13 km NNE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC (just south of normal southern limit of distribution in this area) \* 2, 15/10/95, 21 km NE of Manjimup in recently logged forest (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC

**Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo** - widespread in October, Kingston forest block, 16-23 km north-east of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC (not normally south of Boyup Brook)

**Weebill** - 2, 10/10/95, 23 km NE of Manjimup, in wandoo (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC (unusual this far south-west)

**Red-capped Robin** - 1, 15/10/95, 19 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC (unusual this far south-west)

**Golden Whistler** - 1, 17/8/95, Woodvale Nature Reserve, Woodvale (Wanneroo) - AB \* 1, 17/8/95, Lake Joondalup North (Wanneroo) - EB and RAOU excursion (unusual in this part of the Swan Coastal Plain)

**White-winged Triller** - 1 pair, 3/10/95, 20 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC \* 1 pair, throughout October, 22 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC (unusual this far south-west)

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

**Letter-winged Kite** - 1, July 95, Lyndon River crossing on Exmouth road (Carnarvon) - PSt

**Square-tailed Kite** - 1, 26/10/95, 5 km SW of Kalgoorlie, soaring over woodland (Kalgoorlie-Boulder) - MBa (scarce winter-spring visitor to this area)

**White-winged Fairy-wren** - 1, black or blackish, 17/8/95, Well 43, Canning Stock Route 21 13, 125 58 (East Pilbara) - AF (Note: males can look black or blackish in poor light and, when in fresh plumage, sometimes even in good light because the feather bases are black, not blue)

**Barn Swallow** - 6, 10/10/95, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - FO

### **KIMBERLEY**

**Magpie Goose** - 67, 7/6/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO

**Plumed Whistling-Duck** - 220, 7/6/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO

**Australian Shelduck** - 1, 4-6/10/95, marsh near Derby sewage works (Derby - West Kimberley) - FO \* 1, 7/10/95, Broome sewage works (Broome) - FO (scarce visitor to the Kimberley)

**Green Pygmy-goose** - 1, 7/9 and 29/9/95, Taylor's Lagoon (Broome) - BBO (uncommon near Broome)

**Nankeen Night Heron** - 14, 27/8/95, The Grotto (near Wyndham) (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO \* 50+ (breeding colony?), 20/8/95, along creek near Marglu Billabong (near Wyndham) (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Black Bittern** - 1, 17/9/95, entrance to Lily Creek Lagoon, Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Letter-winged Kite** - 7, 9/10/95, edge of salt marsh near Crab Creek (Broome) - FO

**Black-breasted Buzzard** - 2, 7/6/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO

**Brolga** - 111, 7/6/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO \* 80, 6/10/95, marsh near Derby sewage works (Derby - West Kimberley) - FO

**Oriental Plover** - 18, 16/9/95, Kingston Rest Station, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (reasonably early date for this species) \* 29, 26/9/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

**Red-kneed Dotterel** - 1 immature, 7/6/95, Taylor's Lagoon (Broome) - BBO

**Caspian Tern** - 2, 12/8/95, Gap Dam at Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO \* 2, 16/9/95, Kingston rest station, south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

**Common Bronzewing** - 2 or 3, 2/9/95, near Tanmurra Ck on Carlton Hill station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO \* 1, 3/9/95, Packsaddle Springs near Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (uncommon in East Kimberley)  
**Grass Owl** - 1, 27/8/95 and 1, 3/9/95, Ivanhoe Road near Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (long, trailing legs seen as bird flew)  
**Azure Kingfisher** - 1, 6/10/95, Windjana Gorge National Park (Derby - West Kimberley) - FO  
**Red-browed Pardalote** - 1, 6/10/95, 70 km from Broome towards Derby (Broome) - FO (at or near northern limit of range)  
**Large-billed Gerygone** - 2, 27/8/95, mangroves near Wyndham wharf (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO \* 1, 2/9/95, Tanmurra Creek mangroves, Carlton Hill station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO  
**Green-backed Gerygone** - 4, 19/8/95, Point Springs Nature Reserve, NE of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (scarce in the East Kimberley)  
**Yellow Chat** - 12, 2/8/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - GC \* 7, 20/8/95, Parry Creek floodplain (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO  
**Lemon-bellied (Kimberley) Flycatcher** - 1, 20/8/95, mangroves near Wyndham wharf (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO  
**Hooded Robin** - 3, 26/7/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - GC (uncommon near Broome)  
**Shining Flycatcher** - 1 male, 13/8/95, Coolamon Creek off the Ord River near Lake Argyle dam (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (uncommon this far inland in this area)  
**Northern Fantail** - 1 on nest, 19/8/95, about 40 km from Kununurra along the Cave Springs/ Keep River road (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO \* 3, 25/8/95, Barred Creek (Broome) - GC  
**Masked Woodswallow** - 200, 23/7/95, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO  
**Little Woodswallow** - 13, 3/8/95, Lake Campion (Broome) - BBO (uncommon near Broome)  
**Gouldian Finch** - 1, 29/8/95, Durack Homestead (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - AF  
**Clamorous Reed-Warbler** - 1, 7/9/95, Lake Campion (Broome) - BBO  
**Zitting Cisticola** - 6, 20/8/95, Parry Creek floodplain (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (in dry, 0.5 m high grass; call a two note 'see-sick', very different from Golden-headed Cisticola; small white tip seen on tail)

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#### Notes for Contributors

The Editors request contributors to note:

- WABN publishes material of interest to the WA Group
- contributions should be written or typed with **double spacing**
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary

#### **Deadline for the March Issue**

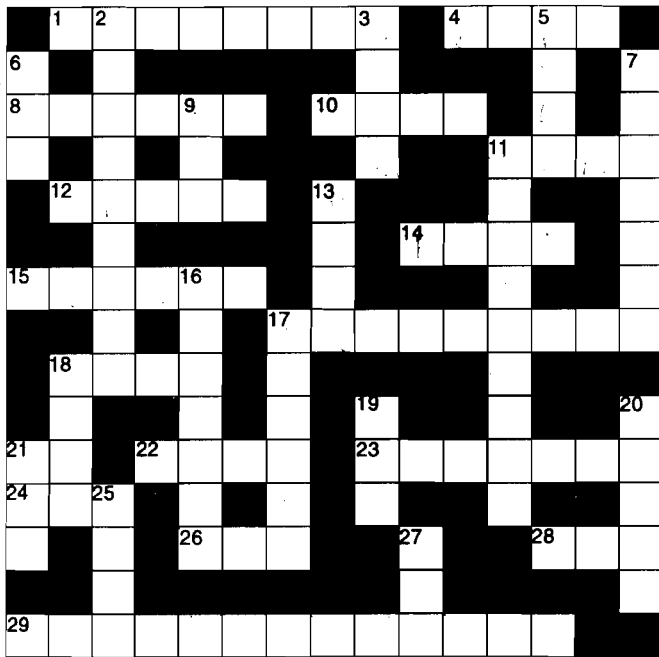
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## Crossword



### CLUES ACROSS

1. An egg could be patterned in this way.
4. A twitcher would be keen to add another one.
8. The ..... Sandpiper has a white rump.
10. A Coot chick can do it within 24 hours of hatching.
11. Unless you saw a male, it would be difficult to tell whether it was a grey or a chestnut one.
12. A bird with a preference for shallow water.
14. WA's bird observatory with a claim to historical fame.
15. Its nest is a shallow depression in the ground.
17. Kind of bird with the audacity to lay its eggs in another's nest.
18. In front of undertail coverts.
21. If it were longer it might be the favourite food of a Rainbow Bee-eater.
22. Small, secretive waterbird.
23. Bird of prey which usually flies low when hunting.
24. Finding yourself in the midst of a colony of several thousand nesting penguins may evoke this feeling.
26. As .... the Common Starling hasn't managed to become established in WA.
28. A Raven may do this to another bird's nest.
29. Australia's only representative of the Flowerpecker family.

### CLUES DOWN

2. Forages on foliage, usually heard before it is seen.
3. Soft underfeathers.
5. The captive breeding of rare species may be reason to need one.
6. As an emperor with specially adapted feet, you wouldn't mind this underfoot.
7. Of the deep sea.
9. In a Kestrel, a keen one may mean an earlier dinner.

11. Area proclaimed by song.
13. Raptor with a barred belly.
16. Tidal mouth of river.
17. One of these may contain remnants of an owl's last meal.
18. It would be great if everyone in the group got a good one every time.
19. Secretive.
20. Small diving waterbird.
21. A white one in the wing may help to identify a fast-disappearing wader.
25. Common to birds and many reptiles.
27. A Common Sandpiper will do this frequently.

## Questions and Answers

A number of contributions from members include questions about the occurrences being reported. We believe that WABN should help to generate discussion between members, and invite contributions in later editions which can help to answer members' queries.

### Editors

## Members' Contributions

### YUIN STATION

Yuin Station was the first to be founded in the Murchison District. It was established in the 1860s after pioneers journeyed up the Greenough River and pronounced the area to be excellent for grazing.

The Yuin Homestead, at which accommodation may be obtained, is near the Greenough River and is classified as a National Trust Historic Homestead. The buildings are of interest in themselves, but the Station has the advantage of a wide variety of birds and after good rains as in 1995, a fine display of everlastings and eremophilas, as well as many other interesting plants of the semi-arid region.

The Station is a little over 469,000 acres (189,000 hectares). It has land on both sides of the Greenough River, but the greater part lies to the north of it. Some of the northern area had been burned (lightning strike) in the last 2-3 years and was relatively poor for birds and I spent most of my time (28 August to 2 September) in areas near the northern side of the Greenough River, where birds were more plentiful.

The Greenough River had large pools of water and is lined with casuarina trees. The *Travellers Atlas* shows Curdy Curdy Rocks (not very interesting apart from Fairy Martins nesting in the scalloped rock edges of the river), but it does not show Nangcarrong Springs or Teamurra Pools, both of which appear on the Central Map Agency 1:250,000 map. These pools had breeding Black Swans and Australasian Grebes as well as 10 other species of waterbirds.

Oddly the *Travellers Atlas* names the Geeloo Claypan, whereas the CMA larger scale map does not (though the location is apparent). There was water in the claypan, a circular area some 250 metres in diameter and no more than 20 millimetres deep. The Claypan and its immediate surrounding area produced a list of 50 species, with one visit yielding 45 species before breakfast.

A list of 60 species on my first full day (including 10

waterbird species) was impressive but was superseded by one, at 61 species the following day (also including 10 waterbird species from a different location). These two days yielded 69 species, but some change in the weather resulted in less total species being seen on any other day. The grand total was 80 species comprising 65 bush and 15 waterbirds.

A Collared Sparrowhawk pair were of interest at one of the bores. They perched in open sunlight less than 10 metres away and always less than two metres above ground, remaining at a similar distance while lunch was eaten (over 40 minutes). Twice they mated, between perching, preening and calling. There was a flat stick nest nearby which had no lining; this may have been that of the sparrowhawks – but they did not approach this structure while being observed. The same bore had Little Crows and Pied Butcherbirds sitting on nests.

Another item of interest was a 'fight' between a Black-faced Woodswallow and a Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush. The sight of a pair of quail-thrush was good in itself as they are not frequently sighted, but as the pair worked slowly over a stony breakaway area accompanied by many Bourke's Parrots (almost tame, perching within two metres) and a large flock of wood-swallows, one of the Black-faced Woodswallows alighted on the ground near the male Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush. He leapt to attack and the birds appeared to struggle on the ground for some seconds before the woodswallow flew up apparently unscathed, while the male quail-thrush 'strutted', with its head drawn well back and upright and its tail fully fanned and inclined forward, as in a male peacock display. After a few moments strutting in this striking pose, the bird lowered its tail and head and resumed its usual rather inoffensive stance.

The total bird list was as follows (species marked with an asterisk were not recorded in this Atlas block [27/116] by Blakers *et al* 1984): Emu, Black Swan, Australian Shelduck, Australian Wood Duck, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal, Pink-eared Duck, Australasian Grebe, Darter\*, White-faced Heron, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Brown Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Brown Falcon, Australian Hobby, Nankeen Kestrel, Eurasian Coot, Common Greenshank, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Black-fronted Dotterel, Banded Lapwing, Common Bronzewing\*, Crested Pigeon, Galah, Cockatiel, Mulga Parrot, Budgerigar, Bourke's Parrot, Elegant Parrot\*, Pallid Cuckoo, Black-eared Cuckoo\*, Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo\*, Red-backed Kingfisher, Sacred Kingfisher\*, Splendid Fairy-wren, Variegated Fairy-wren, White-winged Fairy-wren, Western Gerygone, Inland Thornbill\*, Chestnut-rumped Thornbill, Yellow-rumped Thornbill, Southern Whiteface, Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater, Yellow-throated Miner, Singing Honeyeater, Brown Honeyeater, White-fronted Honeyeater\*, Pied Honeyeater, Crimson Chat, White-fronted Chat, Red-capped Robin, Grey-crowned Babbler, White-browed Babbler, Chiming Wedgebill, Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush, Crested Bellbird, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush\*, Magpie-lark, Grey Fantail\*, Willie Wagtail, Black-faced Cuckoo Shrike, White-winged Triller, Black-faced Woodswallow, Grey Butcherbird\*, Pied Butcherbird, Australian Magpie, Australian Raven\* (called several times whilst at close range near Teamurra Pools), Little Crow, Richards Pipit, Zebra Finch, Mistletoebird, Welcome Swallow, Fairy Martin, Rufous Songlark, Brown Songlark, Silvereye\*.

During my stay two Australian Bustards were observed by Mr Foulkes-Taylor during sheep mustering, but I did not see them.

Yuin is a pleasant birding location. My thanks to Jano and Michael Foulkes-Taylor for guiding me to likely bird localities about the Station.

**Bruce Buchanan**

#### References:

Blakers, M., Davies, S.J.J.F. and Reilly, P.N. (1984) *The Atlas of Australian Birds*. RAOU and Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

*Travellers Atlas of Western Australia*. (1986) 3rd Ed. Dept of Lands and Surveys, W.A.

### WHITE WILLIE WAGTAIL

Geoff Stanton of Wannamal reports having played host to an almost entirely white Willie Wagtail which came to his bird bath. He was visited by the same (or a very similar) bird at about the same time last year.

**Editors**

### BARKING OWL IN AVON VALLEY

During a continuing survey of Avon Valley National Park, a Barking Owl was heard over three nights in October 1994. Both the typical yapping "wuk wuk" and the hair-raising screaming call were heard. The habitat was wandoo woodland. The Barking Owl is very rarely recorded in the south-west. It is believed to be the same subspecies as in south-eastern Australia.

**Jim Masters**



## FLOCKING OF RED WATTLEBIRDS

The land between Peel Inlet and the ocean is at its narrowest point at Dawesville. The movements of bush birds north from the south-west are funnelled into this natural bottleneck.

Over the Easter break I witnessed Red Wattlebirds flocking on the south side of the Dawesville Cut. On the 15th April I was observing birds in a small pocket of Tuart and Banksia between the Bouvarde Bowling Club and the Cut. My attention was drawn to a gathering of Red Wattlebirds in the bare topmost branches of some Tuart trees closer to the water. Some of the birds had flown directly into the top of the trees. Other birds progressed from the lower branches with short flights and hops until there was a bird approximately every 30-40 centimetres along the bare branches. I would estimate at least 150 birds.

The flock then took flight, led by the topmost birds flying out over the channel in a NE direction. Some of the birds wheeled and dipped almost like Tree Martins. When the leading birds were almost halfway across the Cut the flock turned and flew directly back to the trees, diving into the lower branches within seconds.

Then the pattern of getting into the top of the Tuarts was repeated and after about five minutes another flight out over the water would be made.

On the sixth attempt when the flock reached the centre of the Cut the birds split into two groups. Half of the Wattlebirds flew on to the northern side without any aerobatics. This enabled me to count them. There were 64 birds. The rest of the flock returned to the south side of the channel flying into the Banksias and lower branches of the Tuarts. They subsequently gathered in small groups with only a few birds going into the top branches. No further flights over the water were attempted.

The following day I went down to the Cut and again the Wattlebirds were flocking. They had obviously been joined by more birds as the numbers had increased. The pattern was the same as on the previous day but although the birds flew out over the water no birds completed the crossing. The possible reason was a Peregrine Falcon on the north side that flew across and into the trees on the southern side.

On Monday the 17th I was late getting down to Dawesville. However the Wattlebirds were still flocking in the Tuarts. Once again I did not see them complete a flight over the Cut.

Have Wattlebirds previously been recorded flocking in large numbers?

Has there been study of bush bird movement along the south-western coastal plain?

Colin Davis

## FRESH FROM THE PRINTING PRESS

Weekends unlimited – that's what would be needed to make maximum use of RAOU WA Group's latest publication, *Birdwatching: Perth and Environs*.

This booklet describes about 90 sites either around Perth or within reach of a day's trip into six areas beyond it – Darling Range, south of Perth, Mandurah district, Northam, Rottneest and north of Perth. Maps and site information enable readers to tap the local knowledge of the many experienced birdwatchers who have contributed data. The book is not aimed at identification, and illustrations are few – rather, it is a matter

of the RAOU "telling people where to go".

As well as facilitating, satisfying birdwatching, the editors, Allan Jones, Max Bailey and Judy Blyth, hope that use of the booklet will enhance feelings of appreciation and protection towards the environment on which wildlife and plants depend.

The south-west of Western Australia has 11 endemic species of birds, and nine of these occur in the areas covered by the booklet. These birds are all described towards the back.

Finally, there is a separate addendum, Bird List For Perth and Environs compiled by Peter Sandilands from the RAOU Database. It indicates some of the sites at which the 248 species in the areas covered by the booklet may be found. Imagine this as an aid to your Twitchathon effort!

The final draft was checked by John Dell of the WA Museum before the Museum printed it with its shiny and colourful cover.

All in all, *Birdwatching: Perth and Environs*, which grew out of the popular Country Brochures project, is another example of the co-operation of many volunteers of our thriving and busy organisation, the RAOU.

At \$4.00 per copy (add \$1.00 if posting is required), the booklet is available from our headquarters in Perry House – or from other outlets at Kings Park Tourist Kiosk, the National Trust, the WA Museum Shop and the Gould League. Why not succumb to temptation and buy one for yourself – or several for friends or family members for Christmas?!

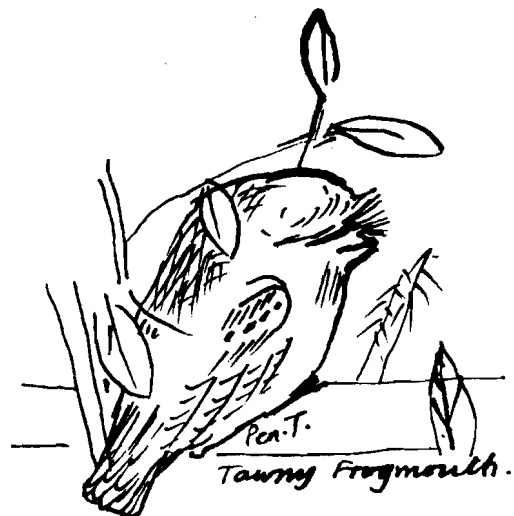
Judy Blyth

## TAWNY FROGMOUTH AT BOLD PARK

During the public bird walks associated with Spring Fling in September 1994, all walk participants were able to see a Tawny Frogmouth at close range. The bird was first seen about 5 m up in a Tuart tree, by Clive Napier.

The public bird walks were also run as part of Spring Fling in September 1995, with Clive again leading the first walk, and there was the Frogmouth again, in exactly the same tree! If it was one of Clive's props, nailed to the perch, he must have forgotten to take it down because it was there again in the first week of Bird Week in October 1995. Unfortunately, it had apparently gone to another perch by the time of the public walks on Sunday 29th October.

John Blyth





**John Blyth**

### **SHELDUCK WITH MIXED BROOD**

Geoff Harris reports an unusual family of Australian Shelduck (locally known as Mountain Ducks) which he saw recently on his farm near Boyup Brook. The family consisted of two adults and nine ducklings. What was unusual was that the ninth duckling was smaller than and marked differently from the other eight. On closer inspection, Geoff determined that the small duckling was a young Australian Wood Duck.

This is not the first time Geoff has noticed this – it happened once before, about three years ago.

It is not known how these “mixed” families originated, but Geoff’s suggestion is that the Shelducks may have taken over a recently commenced Wood Duck nest.

It would be interesting to know how this duckling fares in future. Can Shelducks raise a Wood Duck successfully? If so, does it think it is a Shelduck or a Wood Duck?

**Editors**

### **DEPARTING SANDERLINGS?**

I would like to share with others my experience during late March or early April some three years ago. I walked along the beach for a couple of miles south of Halls Head, Mandurah looking for waders. I saw very little on the way down but on the way home was surprised to see a large group of Sanderlings feeding frantically where the beach was flat and the waves were breaking well out and rolling up the sandy beach. On counting the birds I made the total 53.

On looking further along the beach I saw a similar sized group of 55 Sanderlings about 50 metres away. I took up a position high up on the beach between the two groups to watch for a while, and wondered why the two groups stayed relatively near one another but did not join forces.

Suddenly the first group took off and flew directly out to sea until they were difficult to see through my binoculars. They then wheeled around and came back. I thought they might join the other group, but they returned to their original position.

The second group then went through the same routine. As they returned they came towards the first group, then veered off and landed precisely where they had taken off from.

I presume both groups were doing trial runs before setting off on the long migratory flights homewards. I would be interested to hear if any other RAOU members have had a similar experience.

**Austin Daw**

### **ORIENTAL PLOVERS**

On Saturday 16 September, Jim Gardner (from Kununurra) and I visited Kingston Rest Station about 70 km from Kununurra towards Halls Creek. We went to several sites including a dam built in late 1994 to reclaim water after irrigation.

I observed 11 waders on the muddy shore close to the water. I approached on foot to less than 10 metres before they took flight which confirmed that they were Oriental Plovers (no white rump or wing bars, etc). It is very seldom that I can approach waders this closely. It was only when I got very close that they started to call and to walk along the shore before they flew.

They flew a few hundred metres along the dam and disappeared over the surrounding earth bank. We followed

about 10 minutes later and found them on a small area of open ground near some small (about 0.5 m) bushes. Some were standing in the shadows, while others were standing still, first on one leg and then on the other as if the ground was hot. Again, I was able to approach to less than 10 metres in the car without flushing them. They were calling but made no attempt to walk or fly away. Jim was able to video some of them through the open window.

We continued around the dam to another area where we found seven more Oriental Plovers roosting on a large open area about 30 m from the shore. We didn’t try to get closer than about 30 m, and they largely ignored us. We couldn’t continue any further because of a drain, so we returned the way that we came. The first group was still there, although some had moved under some taller (2 to 3 m) bushes and were almost hidden under the lower branches. I have not heard of waders taking shelter under trees or bushes before.

**Frank O’Connor**

### **GLENFLORRIE STATION**

During the months of August and September I had a busman’s holiday on a cattle station 108 kms SE of Nanutarra Roadhouse (NW Highway). On several occasions we visited windmill tanks/troughs, and always a fire was lit for smoko and lunch. I noticed that after the ashes had cooled down, usually to powderform, Black Honeyeaters flew down and appeared to peck into the ash. Coming back a week later it was noticed no ash remained except a grey circular patch on the ground. Two of the men said that they had seen Crimson Chats acting similarly at another place on the station. Can anyone explain why?

Other interesting observations from the trip are listed below:

- Star Finch – 20 including young, 26/7/95-28/9/95 in date palms on a creek bed near the homestead
- Painted Finch – 40+, 30/7/95-10/9/95 in three areas
- Spinifex Pigeon – 100s including nests and young, 28/7/95-29/9/95
- White-necked Heron – 1, 12/9/95 on a permanent pool in the Wonnelly River
- Bourke’s Parrot – 1 dead, 12/9/95
- Budgerigar – 1000s flying like a green cloud; many young in nests along creeks, 26/7/95-28/9/95
- Spotted Harrier – 1 flying, 1 dead, caught in recently completed fence, 15/9/95
- Little Button-quail – 100s including young (look like brown cotton wool on match sticks), and nests 29/7/95-27/9/95
- Australian (Port Lincoln) Ringneck – 10 at nest hollows along dry creek, 2/9/95
- Willy Wagtail – 2/7/95-29/9/95 with nest on hook on homestead verandah; 4 broods hatched – 2,2,3,2 eggs – seemed to be same parents
- Black-tailed Godwit – 2, 22/8/95 at Carnarvon
- Wedge-tailed Eagle – 1, 25/7/95, seen from bus window and nearly hit as it rose from side of highway with a snake in its talons. This was north of Minilya Roadhouse. I saw a similar happening out of Wyndham 5 years ago.

**F. Robinson**

