

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 77 March 1996

Nesting Great Crested Grebes

For several months this summer the south-west corner of Mongers Lake became a centre of nesting activity for many pairs of Great Crested Grebes. The preferred nesting sites were in a row of little clumps of reeds, just a few metres from the edge of the lake, and there was much competition for these. When all were taken as foundations for their semi-floating mounds, some pairs built in bulrushes at the edge of the lake. Others, unable to find space elsewhere, started mounds at the edge of rushes away from the shore. The latter seemed to be an unsuitable site as mounds were usually abandoned within a few days. Only one pair persisted in this region.

In all, more than a dozen pairs built mounds during November-December and others in January when birds who had hatched their chicks moved to other parts of the lake. The birds vigorously defended the area around their nests, though if the non-incubating one of a pair was absent for a while, nearby birds who were still building would make underwater raids to steal material from the base of the mound. The nests usually contained four or five eggs and while one bird incubated, the other regularly added more vegetation to the mound.

The first chicks hatched towards the middle of December and by the second day were having short swims, though mostly travelling on the backs of the parents. I was particularly interested to see that, as well as small fish, tadpoles, etc, the parent birds fed the

chicks small, downy feathers. These were invariably obtained by preening their own plumage and was consistent behaviour with all the pairs. Reference to HANZAB confirmed this as normal feeding procedure but left me still wondering why something virtually indigestible should be part of their diet. The answer came when reading about the Red-necked Grebe, a North American bird. The book stated that, like other grebes, it swallows feathers, probably to strain out fish bones and other undigested remnants which it periodically regurgitates.

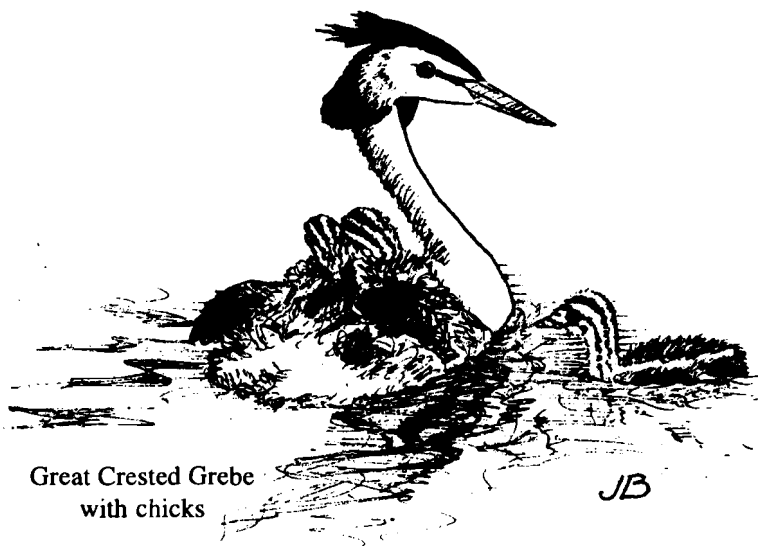
This unique opportunity to see, at close quarters, breeding plumaged grebes going about their courting rituals and nesting activity was not only of interest to dedicated birdwatchers. Many joggers and walkers using the nearby path also stopped to look at them. Who knows – perhaps among those whose curiosity was sparked were some potential future RAOU members.

Mavis Norgard

Reference: Udvardy, M.D.F. (1977) *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Birds, Western Region*. A.A. Knoff

Note: Before this year, Great Crested Grebes were not common on Mongers Lake. The *Scopewest* survey recorded an average of 1-5 birds per survey, and no breeding.

Editors



Great Crested Grebe
with chicks

Observations

NEW BIRDS FOR AUSTRALIA

This issue of WABN sees a number of exciting new records including three species new to Australia and its Territories, as well as a number of records of rarely seen species. Readers are reminded that, for rarely seen or difficult to identify species, adequate documentation is required for inclusion in WABN.

For example, records of waders rarely recorded in the south-west should be accompanied by a description of what was observed and reasons for the identification. For the new records listed below, several are supported by specimens or photographs, and each will be written up in more detail elsewhere.

BIRD 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, 3/10/95, 35 km N of Beacon in low mallee by the State Barrier Fence (Mt Marshall) - CB * 10, 12/1/96, ca. 20 km NE of Naremben (Naremben) - RS * 1, 11/12/95, Bendering NR (25681), 15 km N of Kondinin (Kondinin) - EH * 1, seen three times, 1-6/1/96, mallee-Acacia scrub, NW corner of Lake Gulson Timber Reserve (Lake Grace) - JB, JuB

Freckled Duck - 1, 28/12/95, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC * 1, 7/1/96, Big Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CN

Southern Giant-Petrel - 1s and 2s, various days between 7/7 and 31/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Kerguelen Petrel - frequently reported, 23/6 - 31/10/95; highest numbers 400+ on 14/9/95, 300+ over 2 hours on 17/9/95 and 1000+ in 2 hours on 10/10/95, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Great-winged Petrel - 1, 18/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual on the west coast)

Soft-plumaged Petrel - recorded on 5 days in Oct 95, with largest number (100+) on 10/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Blue Petrel - recorded on 7 occasions in Oct 95 with highest numbers 200+ on 4/10/95 and 40+ over 8 hours on 10/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Broad-billed/Salvin's/Antarctic/Slender-billed/Fairy Prions - varying numbers, 22/6/95 to 23/10/95, but highest number at Pt Dalling, Dunsborough, was 200+ on 18/7/95 (Busselton) - RP (see also Observations section in WABN 75)

White-chinned Petrel - frequently reported in small numbers, 20/6 - 31/10/95; highest numbers 16 on 28/6/95, 14 on 11/8/95 and 18 on 17/10/95, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Grey Petrel - seen on 9 days in Oct 95, highest number 8, 21/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Flesh-footed Shearwater - 20+, 26/10/95, Gull Rock, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP

Hutton's Shearwater - 20+, 5/8/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Little Shearwater - 3, 10/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Yellow-nosed Albatross - 100+ over 8 hours, 8/10 and 10/10/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Royal Spoonbill - 1 (with Yellow-billed Spoonbills), 26/1/96, Station Lake (Esperance) - JB, JuB and Hooded Plover Group (rarely recorded on the south coast)

Yellow-billed Spoonbill - ca. 20, 26/1/96, Station Lake (Esperance) - JB, JuB and Hooded Plover Group (not often recorded this far east on the south coast)

Black-tailed Godwit - 1, 20/1/96, Alfred Cove (Melville) - MC * 39, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC

Bar-tailed Godwit - 200+, 29/12/95, mouth of the Greenough River (Greenough) - CB

Marsh Sandpiper - 49, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (good number for this site)

Sanderling - 30, 7/1/96, Government House Lake, Rottnest Island - FO (not usual in these numbers away from the coast)

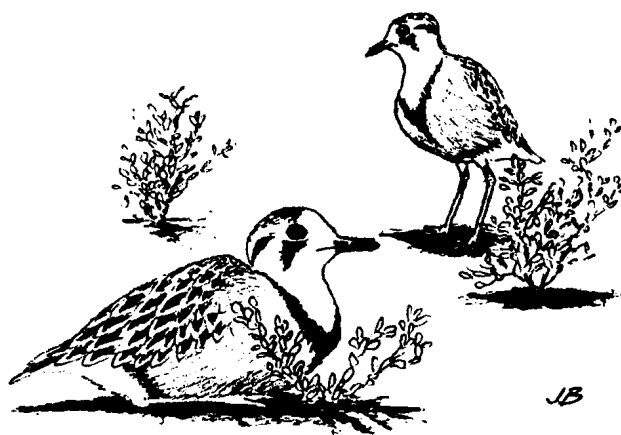
Red-necked Stint - 2164, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (high number for this site)

Broad-billed Sandpiper - 1, 30/10/95, Alfred Cove (Melville) - PS * 1, 27/12/95, Alfred Cove (Melville) - GMo, MC * 2, 4/2/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JD

Red-necked Phalarope - 3 (2 males, 1 female), 10/11/95, Pearse Lakes, Rottnest Island - FO * 3, 7/1/96, Government House Lake, Rottnest Island - FO

Black-winged Stilt - 1341, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC (high number for this site)

Inland Dotterel - 20+, 5/1/96, in sparse, dry samphire in bed of Lake O'Connor (NW lake of Lake King chain of lakes) (Kondinin) - JB, JuB



Inland Dotterels
at Lake O'Connor

Hooded Plover - 2, with nest with 3 eggs, 21/10/95, Mandalay Beach (Denmark) - MNa * 89, 26/1/96, Station Lake (Esperance) - JB, JuB * 930, 27/1/96, Lake Gore (Esperance) - JB, BN, RAOU Hooded Plover Project team

Common Tern - 43, 8/1/96, Mandurah harbour (Mandurah) - FO

Fairy Tern - estimated 80+ nests containing eggs to large chicks, 27/12/95, Mandurah (Mandurah) - MC
White-winged Black Tern - 80, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC * 110, 22/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK
Diamond Dove - 2, 3/10/95, Mt Churchman, N of Beacon (Mt Marshall) - CB
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo - 1, 25/1/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC
Regent Parrot - 11, 20/12/95, N end of Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - RS
Barking Owl - 1, 8/5/94 and 19/5/94, Avon River, West Toodyay (Toodyay) - MH ("screaming woman" call heard)
White-breasted Robin - 2, 29/9/95, Araluen Botanic Park (Armadale) - JS, HS
Crested Bellbird - 1, 11/1/96, Melaleuca Park (Wanneroo) - CB
White-backed Swallow - 50+, 29/12/95, 5 km N of Albany airport (Albany) - LD, ChD (unusual this far south)

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

Black Swan - 13, 8/1/96, Goodwin A platform, 138 km off Karratha - TK
Leach's Storm-Petrel - 1, 31/1/96, Goodwin A platform, 130 km off Dampier at 19°39' S, 115°55' E - TK, GME (few previous records from WA)
Black-necked Stork - 1, 8/7/95, flying over the Maitland River crossing, NW Coastal Hwy (Roebourne) - BBa, MCI
Letter-winged Kite - 2, 12/7/95, 10 km N of Sandfire Roadhouse, ie 310 km S of Broome (Broome) - BBa, MCI
Grey Falcon - 4, 15/12/95, 10 km E of Jimblebar Minesite on road to Jigalong (East Pilbara) - RD, RT
Pomarine Jaeger - 1, 9/12/95, Goodwin A platform, 138 km off Karratha - TK (unusual this far north)
Oriental Cuckoo - 1, 7/1/96, Karratha (Roebourne) - TK (rarely recorded in the Pilbara)
Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush - 1, 2/10/95, in *Acacia* shrubland 5 km SE of Thundelarra HS (Yalgoo) - CB (near S limit)
Brown Songlark - young male, 6/12/95, Goodwin A platform, 138 km off Karratha - TK
Blue-and-white Flycatcher - 1 male, 12/95, Cossack (Roebourne) - G. and C. Morton per REJ (first record for Australia; details will be published in the WA Naturalist)
Narcissus Flycatcher - 2 males, 12/95, photographed on Barrow Island (Roebourne) - WAPET personnel SF, PD (first record for Australia; details will be reported elsewhere)

KIMBERLEY

Black Swan - 7, 29/10/95, Argyle Diamonds tailings dam (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (uncommon in the Kimberley)
Green Pygmy-goose - 1, 26/10/95, Taylor's Lagoon (Broome) - RJ, PC * 3, 26/10/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - RJ, PC
Streaked Shearwater - 1 beachwashed, 4/11/95, near Broome (Broome) - HM, BBO * 7, 19-24/12/95, Broome port (Broome) - HM
Wedge-tailed Shearwater - 12, 19-24/12/95, Broome port (Broome) - HM

Hutton's Shearwater - 1, 24/12/95, Cable Beach (Broome) - HM
Letter-winged Kite - 2, 22/10/95, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - RJ, PC * 19, 29/10/95, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - JF * 1, 16/11/95, Anna Plains (Broome) - BBO * 1, 14/1/96, Broome (Broome) - PC, RJ
Grey Falcon - 3, 26/10/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - RJ, PC * 2, 27/10/95, Anna Plains (Broome) - RJ, MR, PC
Brolga - 520, 26/10/95, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - RJ, PC
Little Curlew - 5000, 19/11/95, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO * 12 000, 9/1/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - PC, RJ
Eastern Curlew - 1100, 9/12/95, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - HM
Common Redshank - 5, 16/11/95, Eighty Mile Beach (Broome) - BBO
Ruff - 2, 28/10/95, Anna Plains (Broome) - RJ, MR, PC * 1, 14/12/95, Broome sewage works (Broome) - PC, RJ
Oriental Plover - 1000, 10/1/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - PC, RJ
Oriental Pratincole - 20 000, 17/1/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - PC, RJ
Roseate Tern - 10, 18/11/95, Broome area (Broome) - BBO * 50, 20-21/12/95, Broome port (Broome) - PC, RJ
Sooty Tern - 19, 19/12/95, Broome port (Broome) - PC, RJ
Common Noddy - 60, 20-22/12/95, Broome port (Broome) - PC, RJ
Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove - 1, 19/12/95, Cable Beach (Broome) - PC, RJ (third record for Broome)
Channel-billed Cuckoo - 1, 2/11/95, Lombadina (Broome) - RJ, PC (at W limit of distribution)
Blue-winged Pitta - 1 beachwashed, 20/12/95, Coconut Well (Broome) - BD (fourth record for Australia)
Silver-crowned Friarbird - 1, 2/11/95 and 4/11/95, Lombadina (Broome) - RJ, PC (S and W limit of distribution)
Banded Honeyeater - 1, 3/11/95, Gregory Well (Broome) - RJ, PC
Yellow Wagtail - 1, 17/11/95, Anna Plains (Broome) - BBO
Black-backed Wagtail - 2, 30/12/95, Derby (Derby-West Kimberley) - SPC (photographs available; details will be written up elsewhere)
Crimson Finch - 5, 5/11/95, Argyle Diamonds LIA workshop (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO (unusual this far south)

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Eastern Reef Egret - White phase: 6 between Flying Fish Cove and North West Point and 2 at The Blowholes; Dark phase: 2 at Flying Fish Cove and 3 at Waterfall, 1/96 - KC (possibly becoming more common)
Pied Heron - 1, 1/96, Waterfall - KC
White-breasted Waterhen - 5 adults and 2 chicks, 1/96 - KC (first recorded on Christmas Is in 1992 or 1993; apparently increasing in numbers)
Gallinago Snipe - 1, 5/1/96, near North West Point - MC
Pin-tailed Snipe - 1, 1/96, freshly dead, found under a power line near the cricket oval - KC
Common Tern - 1, 9/1/96, Flying Fish Cove - MC, JC
Little Tern - 1, 4-12/1/96, Flying Fish Cove - JC, MC (according to ranger staff, had been present since early November)
Grey Wagtail - 7 over several days, 1/96 - KC

Java Sparrow - 65+, 3/1/96, Poon Saan (part of settlement area) - MC (possibly increasing in numbers?)
Common Wheatear - 1, 12/95 - KC (first record for Australia or its territories: details will be published elsewhere.

COCOS-KEELING ISLANDS

Grey Plover - 4, 7/12/95, North Keeling Island - KC
Oriental Pratincole - 15, 1994, West Island - KC * 1, 7/12/95, West Island - KC
White Tern - breeding (on eggs), 7/12/95, North Keeling Island - KC
Dollarbird - 1, 7/12/95, Home Island - KC (first record for the Cocos-Keeling Islands)
Myna Acridotheres sp. (possibly a Jungle Myna, *A. fuscus*) - 1, 7/12/95, Home Island - KC

OBSERVERS

BBa = Bryan Barrett	MBa = Mike Bamford
BBO = Broome Bird Observatory	MC = Michael Craig
BD = Bruce Davis	MCl = Margery Clegg
CB = Craig Boase	MH = Max Howard
ChD = Charlie Davies	MNa = Margaret Nash
CN = Clive Nealon	MR = Mavis Russell
EH = Emma Holland	PC = Peter Collins
FO = Frank O'Connor	PD = Peter Doig
GME Gail McEwen	PS = Peter Sandilands
GMo = Glenn Moore	RD = Robert Davis
HM = Helen McArthur	RJ = Ros Jessop
HS = Helen Start	REJ = Ron Johnstone
JB = John Blyth	RP = Ross Payton
JuB = Judy Blyth	RS = Rod Smith
JC = Jean Craig	RT = Roy Teale
JD = John Darnell	SF = Stephan Fritz
JS = John Start	SPC = Sr Pat Comeford
KC = Kevin Coate	TK = Tony Kirkby
LD = Liz Davies	

RAOU Office Perry House
 71 Oceanic Drive,
 Floreat 6014

Telephone (09) 383 7749

Facsimile (09) 387 8412

Chairman B Wilson
 46 Farrant Street,
 Gooseberry Hill, 6076
 Tel. (09) 293 1094

Joint Editors John Blyth
 Tel. (09) 405 5100 (w)
 Tel. (09) 381 6293 (h)
 Fax. (09) 306 1641 (w)
 Email. johnb@wood.calm.wa.gov.au

Allan Burbidge
 Tel. (09) 405 5109 (w)
 Tel/Fax. (09) 306 1642 (h)
 Fax. (09) 306 1641 (w)
 Email. allanb@wood.calm.wa.gov.au

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** - a copy on disk of word processed documents would assist, especially if in WordPerfect or MS Word format
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary.

Deadline for the June Issue
1 May 1996
at Perry House

CHANGE OF POSTAL ADDRESS

Kindly note that from 1 March 1996, all mail will be delivered direct to our office at 71 Oceanic Drive, Floreat 6014 and not to the post office box at Belmont.

Please amend your records accordingly.

Members' Contributions

BEE-EATERS EATING CALCITE

On 18 and 19 November 1995, we camped at the Old Congelin Station site and on both evenings visited the dam. A flock of about 12 Rainbow Bee-eaters performed the same ritual on both occasions. Between 1700 and 1800 hours they arrived and landed on trees surrounding the dam before flying down and drinking from the surface. Each bird appeared to make several sorties before its thirst was satisfied.

The Bee-eaters then changed their tactics and started to bathe sometimes swooping low and splashing the surface with

their bellies and wings and on other occasions almost completely submerging and coming to a halt before flapping off the surface and flying to a tree to preen.

After this they flew down to the ground and proceeded to pick up and swallow small pieces of white calcite-like material from the banks. One bird pecked at a dried bone while another picked up a larger piece of dark material, flew onto a branch and tried to swallow it. It proved to be too large and while altering its position in its bill the material fell. Another Bee-eater caught it in mid-air and also tried to swallow it, failed and the material fell to the ground. On picking it up we found it to be a piece of crustacean shell about 2 cm long and 1 cm wide.

John and Helen Start

Editors' note: See also the article below concerning birds eating ash and/or charcoal, possibly as a source of calcium.

BLACK HONEYEATERS AND ASH

In the last issue of WABN (No. 76, p. 9), F. Robinson reported seeing Black Honeyeaters feeding amongst ash on Glenflorrie Station.

Similar behaviour has been reported before, particularly for Black Honeyeaters. Other Australian species recorded eating ash and/or nibbling or eating charcoal include the Short-tailed Shearwater, Bourke Parrot, Tree Martin, Fairy Martin, Dusky Wood-swallow, Double-barred Finch and Zebra Finch (Mollison and Green 1962, Baldwin 1965, Chisholm 1967). However, it appears to have been reported most often for Black Honeyeaters, and within this species, most reports concern female birds.

In Western Australia, Seyfort (1984) reported female Black Honeyeaters swallowing "small white lumps of potash" picked up from the ash of old campfires at several places in the Murchison region. One local RAOU member, Kevin Coate, has reported female, but not male, Black Honeyeaters feeding on ash at the time of commencement of breeding in the Pilbara and Murchison. Analysis of a sample of the ash showed that it was very high in calcium, suggesting that the females may have been building up their calcium levels prior to nesting and egg-laying (Coate 1985).

"birds feed calcareous material ... to
their nestlings"

Elsewhere, Pescott (1985) observed Black Honeyeaters carrying pieces of charcoal in north-western Victoria, and cited an observation by L. Conole of Black Honeyeaters eating charcoal in this same area. In South Australia, Black Honeyeaters have also been seen feeding amongst charcoal and ash (Hutchins 1988) but in this case, both male and female birds were involved. Although these observations were also at a time of breeding, they suggest an explanation different to, or more complex than, that offered by Kevin Coate.

It is known that some birds feed calcareous material (grit, shells of molluscs) to their nestlings, presumably to supply the calcium needed when forming the skeleton (Campbell and Lack 1985, p. 256). If Black Honeyeaters did this, it may provide the explanation for male and female birds picking up bits of charcoal, although it does not seem to provide an

explanation for actually eating charcoal or ash, because they would simply carry it to the young. Obviously, further careful observations would be of interest, and if any RAOU member notices such behaviour, it would be interesting to obtain chemical analyses of the ash as well as charcoal, along with observations on the stage of breeding.

Allan Burbidge

References:

- Baldwin, M. 1965. Birds eating charcoal. *Emu* 64: 208.
Campbell, B. and Lack, E. 1985. *A Dictionary of Birds*. T. and A.D. Poyser, Calton, Staffordshire.
Chisholm, A.H. 1967. Some ornithological oddities: concerning gizzard-stones. *Emu* 66: 374-375.
Coate, K. 1985. Black Honeyeaters feeding on ash. *Western Australian Naturalist* 16: 51-52.
Hutchins, B.R. 1988. Black Honeyeaters feeding amongst charcoal and ash. *South Australian Ornithologist* 30: 160.
Mollison, B.C. and Green, R.H. 1962. Mist-netting Tree Martins on charcoal patches. *Emu* 61: 277-280.
Pescott, T. 1988. Black Honeyeaters and charcoal. *Geelong Naturalist* 22: 37-39.
Seyfort, M. 1984. B.O.C. Western Australia Tour, 1-23 September, 1984. *Bird Observer* 635: 124.

NESTING BLACK-FRONTED DOTTERELS

In December, after being given information by Peter Sandilands regarding a Black-fronted Dotterel he had found nesting at the entrance to Herdsman Wildlife Centre, I went to check it out. I couldn't see the bird when I parked by the gate, but had only taken a few steps before it flew up from the nest and went into its broken wing act, which enabled me to pinpoint the spot. The nest was a small depression in the ground containing three eggs, and was only a few metres from the edge of the road—Flynn Street. There was plenty of passing traffic along the road, but probably no pedestrians used that area, which was on the eastern side of the entrance to the Centre. Amongst the dead grass and leaves, the nest was almost invisible. The location was probably chosen because the surrounding vegetation effectively camouflaged the nest, and perhaps the proximity to human activity may have provided a measure of protection from predators.

Two days later I revisited the site and found three tiny newly hatched chicks. The colours and markings of their down merged so perfectly with their surroundings that I could see them only because I knew exactly where the nest was located. As I was about to leave Perth for a few days, I did not see them again, but hopefully, they have become active little runners and blended in with all the other wildlife at Herdsman.

Mavis Norgard

MASKED WOODSWALLOWS DOWN SOUTH

On 7 November 1995, at 0900 hours, a large flock of approximately 500 Woodswallows was seen flying from east to west high above our house in Cape Le Grand National Park. Even with binoculars the majority of Woodswallows were too high to identify, but those that were flying lower could be identified as Masked Woodswallows and I assume that the remainder were of the same species. A constant chat-chat-chat could be heard from them as they moved across the sky.

Sandy Rose



A guide to 90 birding sites within 100 km of Perth

The booklet is in colour and contains
the following information:

- Maps showing site locations and route directions
- Details for each site with some of the species recorded
- Other interesting information – historical, picnic facilities, etc
- Section on species endemic to south-west of WA and where to find them
- Supplementary list of birds recorded in the area covered by booklet

**A MUST FOR BIRDWATCHERS
AND
AN IDEAL GIFT FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS**

Prepared by members of WA Group RAOU

Copies available NOW at the RAOU office
\$4.00 per copy (\$5.00 posted)
Tel: (09) 383 7749

LITTLE BITTERN AT PERRY LAKES

On 15 November 1995 at approximately 4.45pm I was walking around the western side of the east lake at Perry Lakes. I glimpsed a small heron-like bird flying low over the water before disappearing into the reed bed opposite the scout memorial.

My initial impression was that of a bird with a very dark back, large light patches on the wing covert area, and underneath, grading from a tawny colour at the front to a very pale, whitish belly and vent area. I could not locate the bird where it had entered the reeds but kept looking in the hope that it would reappear. After some minutes I was rewarded. The bird appeared about 2 metres from where I had last seen it and walked slowly along the edge of the reeds.

It was small (for a heron) with a yellow beak, which appeared to be 'outlined' on the upper mandible, and the legs

were greenish yellow. The back was black with a greenish gloss, the head and rear neck were a rich dark chestnut colour, and the folded wings provided large pale patches of buff on the sides of the bird. Underneath the colour graded from reddish buff at the throat to white at the lower belly.

The bird remained in good view for perhaps two minutes, sometimes stretching out the neck and at others crouching and looking even smaller. It finally flew across the water some 100 metres and disappeared into more reeds. In flight, going away from my position, the bird was dark backed and dark winged with distinctive large and pale scapular patches.

Overall, a very good sighting of a Little Bittern.

Clive Nealon

RED-TAILED BLACK-COCKATOOS

At Piesse Brook over a three-week period from 16 September to 7 October 1995, a flock of 15 birds were resident enjoying the seeds of the green gum-nuts (honky nuts) of marri *Eucalyptus calophylla*. These Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos are much more destructive of the actual honky nut than the Red-capped Parrots which enjoy the seeds at a later stage and chew at the base of the nut only, before dropping them to the ground. The Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos chew the nut longitudinally leaving a half nut on the ground.

Mary Bremner

SHORT-BILLED BLACK-COCKATOOS IN SUBURBAN WEMBLEY

On the morning of 6 November 1995 between 5.30 am and 6.30 am, a flock of 37 birds descended on the almond tree and stripped the tree of the almonds, throwing them to the ground. Other years it has always been the Australian Ringnecks that try to crack these hard-shelled almonds. The Australian Ringnecks are unable to crack the nuts and throw them down leaving easy pickings for the humans. The Short-billed Black-Cockatoos however managed to crack open most of the nuts leaving shell remnants only on the ground.

Mary Bremner

BLACK-COCKATOOS ON THE GOLF COURSE

Keen golfer, Mr John Collins of Booragoon, has been observing White-tailed Black-Cockatoos on the Royal Perth Golf Course for some years, and believes that the numbers are higher this summer than he has ever seen before. During January he has been seeing 150 to 200 birds regularly.

Of even more note than the numbers is the feeding behaviour observed by Mr Collins. The cockatoos (probably mainly Short-billed Black-Cockatoos) feed largely on several species of introduced conifers growing on the course. Apparently the cockatoos spend little time attempting to open the very hard cones while they are on the trees. However, most of the cones, when mature and broken off the tree, open and release their seeds as they dry out, usually within one to two weeks. The black-cockatoos appear to time their visits so that mature cones knocked off the trees on one visit have opened to release their seeds by the next. Thus, during the first visit of the summer the birds are mainly in the trees, chewing off mature cones, and on the second and subsequent visits, usually one to two weeks apart, much time is spent on the ground, feeding on seeds recently released from the drying cones.

While I have not searched the literature, I am not aware

of any similar reports of such behaviour in relation to black-cockatoos and very hard fruited native plants, such as hakeas and banksias, upon which they (especially Short-billed Black-Cockatoos) have traditionally fed. It would be interesting to know how common the reported behaviour is and whether it is long-established or has been learned to take advantage of the new resource provided by widespread planting of introduced conifers.

John Blyth

GIRALIA STATION

Giralia (pronounced to rhyme with dahlia) is a sheep station to the south of Exmouth Gulf. I visited the Station to make a species survey during the last six days of July 1995. Accommodation is available at the Station. It was not possible to cover the whole area for it is some 265 000 hectares or 1000 square miles in size.

It became quickly apparent that the most rewarding birding area was west of the main road which runs through the Station, for this area abuts the Giralia Range (maximum height 97 metres) and results in a number of small creek lines. It was about these lesser creeks and floodways that most birds were to be found. Generally speaking, a fine line of River Red Gums was only sparsely populated with birds for the intermittent flood waters leave a creek bed of rock and gravelly sand with all adjacent understorey swept away. By contrast the lesser creek lines have a good coverage of shrubs and variety of plant species.

The rainfall averages 260 mm, the soil is sandy (and in places a magnificent terracotta colour) and the predominant cover is *Triodia spinifex*. The major creek lines are lined with River Red Gums (*E. camaldulensis*) while the banks of the lesser creeks and floodways are covered with bluebush, acacia and cassia shrubs. Many of these were in flower, predominantly yellow in colour. No creek was running at the time of my visit; only two held some shallow water and no birds were seen.

The area to the east of the main road largely comprises sandy spinifex plains interspersed with sand ridges some 20 metres high, usually greater than a kilometre apart and with few creek lines. Mature spinifex areas were unrewarding from a birding viewpoint.

Sixty-three species were seen in all. Eight of these were sea/shore/mangrove birds for I took the eighty kilometre track to the Exmouth Gulf. Giralia has the only section of coast that may be reached between Exmouth and Onslow and frequent trespass, mainly for fishing, has resulted in a very poor track. However the sighting of a Collared Kingfisher in the mangroves resulted – a species not recorded in the Atlas block (Blakers *et al.* 1984). The other 'shore' species were Australian Pelican, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Pied and Sooty Oystercatcher, Silver Gull, Caspian and Crested Tern and Yellow White-eye, these last being in acacia shrubs some four kilometres from the mangroves, though near a shore line. Arrival at the Gulf was near high tide and the mangroves were silent and apparently without birds, despite much walking. Bush species sighted elsewhere are listed below (species marked with an asterisk were not recorded in this Atlas block by Blakers *et al.* 1984):

Emu – quite common; one chick was sighted.

Stubble Quail* – one bird seen on two days in different locations, along creek lines.

Black-shouldered Kite – one only seen hovering.

Spotted Harrier – two birds seen on the same day. These were possibly the same bird for both were seen just over River Red Gums along the same major creek line, although 25 kilometres and seven hours apart.

Brown Goshawk – single bird seen on four days, usually circling at height.

Collared Sparrowhawk – one sighting only; seen very low over spinifex and shrubs.

Wedge-tailed Eagle – one bird seen on four days, at height. A nest (not in current use) was found on a lesser creek line.

Little Eagle – one bird, circling high.

Brown Falcon – one seen, perched near a creek line, with many other birds present.

Nankeen Kestrel – frequently seen every day; maximum three at one time; two were mating near a nest hole. All swooped and glided, none was seen to hover at any time.

Australian Bustard – two pairs seen on two days.

Little Button-quail* – seen once on small creek line.

Banded Lapwing – a pair, in an area made bare by sheep near a water tank.

Common Bronzewing – one bird at a water trough.

Crested Pigeon – very common. Largest group near water trough about 50. With water troughs in each paddock, Crested Pigeons arrive at them at all hours of the day.

Diamond Dove – two small flocks in an area of recently burned spinifex.

Galah – small flocks seen every day. Markedly less raucous when disturbed than is the case near the Wheatbelt. One pair lining a nest hole.

Little Corella – a group roosted near the Homestead for three nights and were seen once further afield.

Cockatiel – small flocks seen (up to eight) on three days.

Australian Ringneck – seen on three days, four maximum, always near River Red Gums. One pair lining a nest hole.

Budgerigar – seen on three days, usually small flocks, one large, usually near recently burned spinifex.

Pallid Cuckoo – up to three seen together; seen on three days along the same creek line.

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo – one seen and calling on two days on the same creek line as the Pallid Cuckoo.

Australian Owlet-nightjar – one recently dead found in dry creek bed.

Red-backed Kingfisher – single bird seen in widely different locations on two days.

Rainbow Bee-eater – two pairs at one creek line, 20+ at another.

Variegated Fairy-wren – seen on four days, several times each day.

White-winged Fairy-wren – seen on five days, several times each day, appears more common than Variegated.

Red-browed Pardalote – two single sightings only, in dry, bare areas.

Redthroat – seen once near Exmouth Gulf. Storr (1984) comments that this is an isolated population.

Yellow-throated Miner – small flocks readily seen, usually associated with River Red Gums.

Singing Honeyeater – common, single or pairs.

White-plumed Honeyeater – common, single to small flocks, mainly associated with River Red Gums. Nesting at Homestead.

Pied Honeyeater* – one pair calling, seen once only.

Crimson Chat – three parties seen, one in recently burned spinifex, one in dense shrubs near water, one in open near water.

Hooded Robin – seen on three days, once a pair, the other two sightings of males only. In drier areas.

Grey-crowned Babbler – parties seen on four days near creeklines, once with White-browed in same bush.

White-browed Babbler – seen every day, generally more timid and less curious than appears the case further south.

Chiming Wedgebill – very common near some creeks, three seen together, up to five calling at once, widely distributed in shrub areas.

Crested Bellbird – a male and a female seen, calling every day, widely distributed.

Magpie-lark – pairs seen every day, usually near creeks.

Willie Wagtail – two birds seen on different days in widely separate locations.

Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike – parties up to six seen on five days.

White-winged Triller – seen twice, once a pair, once a male only. In drier areas near creeks.

White-breasted Woodswallow – small flock seen overhead and one roosting on the shingle at Exmouth Gulf.

Black-faced Woodswallow – small groups common, they appear to work across the country during the day, generally perching low even when higher perches are available. With Crested Pigeon, appear to be the most common bird.

Pied Butcherbird – seen every day, single or pairs, one pair with two young of last year.

Little Crow – four the maximum together, usually one bird, seen on four days. Not common.

Richard's Pipit – two birds maximum at any time, seen in bare areas on three days. Not common.

Zebra Finch – common, small parties only. Seen every day. Like Crested Pigeon came to water at all hours of the day.

Mistletoebird – two pairs seen in widely different localities; much mistletoe was evident.

Welcome Swallow – seen each day but only around the Homestead.

Tree Martin – seen on five days, one large group nesting in River Red Gum holes at a small creek.

Rufous Songlark – three pairs seen along the same creek line and not elsewhere.

My thanks to Rae and Denver Blake for their hospitality and for guiding me to station tracks and access points. Although possessing the latest Central Map Agency map I found the main road moved by four kilometres and most Station tracks affected thereby. 4WD is needed for most Station tracks.

Bruce Buchanan

References:

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

Storr, G.M. (1984) *Birds of the Pilbara region, Western Australia*, Records of the Western Australian Museum Supplement No. 16, Perth.

GALAH/LITTLE CORELLA HYBRID

At 6.15 pm on Saturday 9 December 1995 at Point Walter Reserve I noticed a Galah accompanied by a Little Corella

feeding what appeared to be two young. Closer observation revealed that the young had some of the characteristics of both parents as follows:

Back: lighter grey than the adult Galah,

Chest and breast: a very light shell pink, not the deep pink of the adult Galah or even as dark as other young Galahs that were present on the reserve,

Crest: higher and more elongated like the Little Corella,

Eye skin: blue like the Little Corella,

Undertail, thigh and belly: creamy-white similar to the Little Corella,

In flight: the underside of the wings (primaries and secondaries) was a mix of the light grey and shell pink mentioned earlier while the rump was white.

The young spent most of their time on the ground searching for food with their presumed parents. It would be interesting to know whether the hybrids are capable of breeding or are sterile.

Peter Sandilands

MORE ON MIXED BROODS

The article on mixed Australian Shelduck/Australian Wood Duck broods on page nine of the December Bird Notes (No 76) reminded me of a similar situation I observed over a number of visits to a farm in Tammin shire this year. A pair of Australian Shelduck breed each year near a dam by the farm stockyards. This year they spent a number of days fighting off other contenders for the area, as well as harassing a pair of Grey Teal that were attempting to nest. As Wood Duck were in the area before the Shelduck arrived it is quite likely that they were usurped from their nest site by the larger, more aggressive Shelducks. Once in control, the Shelducks settled down to hatch 10 ducklings, one of which was considerably darker and smaller than the others. As they grew it became obvious that the odd one out was a Wood Duck even though it acted just like a Shelduck. It regularly "commuted" with the rest of the brood to the feeders in the stockyard. Here the adults were noticed pecking the head of any young animal that came to eat at "their" feeder. Two of the brood fell prey to predators – probably foxes – but the rest fledged successfully including the Wood Duck. The young have now departed although the adults still remain at the time of writing (December 1995).

Although the Australian Wood Duck was raised successfully, it is likely to be an "Australian Shelduck" until death, due to the process of imprinting on the first moving object it saw – probably the female Shelduck.

Peter Sandilands

THE PILBARA – A TWITCHER'S PARADISE

A recent trip to Newman with zoologist Roy Teale proved to be an unforgettable trip. All up, some 75 species of birds were sighted, simply by casual observation as we proceeded about our daily work. The arid spinifex grassland, punctuated by the ancient upthrusts which are the Ophthalmia Ranges, provided an ideal habitat for raptors. Almost every raptor that one would expect to see was seen. The most common bird of prey was the large Spotted Harrier, which was often sighted hovering just metres above the spinifex, in wait for a small rodent or lizard to break cover. Similarly, the Nankeen Kestrel and Australian Hobby were seen frequently, soaring low over the spinifex plains, often alighting on dead branches to rest

or consume their catch of large grasshoppers or reptiles.

Black Kites and Whistling Kites were seen soaring high above the rocky scree slopes and spinifex grass plains, and a Little Eagle was spotted riding the thermals high above the road. Brown Falcons appeared to be numerous, often seen roosting in trees where they would consume the small *Ctenophorus* dragon lizards which were overwhelmingly abundant throughout the area. Our excitement elevated with an apparent sighting of a Black Falcon roosting in a tree, but upon closer examination, it proved to be a Brown Falcon with very dark coloration. An exciting twitch was of the schedule 4 listed Peregrine Falcon, which was seen roosting for some time, on a dead tree by the roadside, before taking to the air once again.

The most significant and exciting twitch of the trip, and indeed in my birding career so far, was the sighting of not one, but **four** Grey Falcons. Our attention was initially attracted by four medium-sized raptors circling at great height, over a small *Acacia aneura* dominated drainage system which bisected the *Triodia* grassland some 300 metres to the south of the road which we were on. Upon observation with binoculars for some three minutes it was decided by myself and Mr Roy Teale (a man of considerable birding experience) that they were birds the like of which we had never seen but were undoubtedly falcons and most likely Grey Falcons. Consultation with *A Field Guide to The Birds Of Australia* (Simpson and Day), which we had with us, allowed us to positively identify these birds as Grey Falcons, by merit of their distinctive colour, stubby striped tail and horizontal silhouette whilst gliding. The group appeared to consist of two adults and two juveniles (based on their smaller size).

“the rest of the trip ... produced some exciting finds”

Although this was undoubtedly the highlight of the trip, the rest of the trip still produced some exciting finds. Examination of roadkills produced a Spotted Nightjar and a juvenile Bourke's Parrot. There were the usually large flocks of wheeling Budgerigars, Cockatiels, Zebra Finches and Painted Finches, over the spinifex lowlands. Four Mulga Parrots were sighted near a temporary waterhole. One parrot was in its full, beautifully coloured plumage, and the other three were obviously juveniles. The spinifex grasslands also played home to several Spinifexbirds and to the rarely seen and elusive Striated Grasswren. Chestnut-rumped Thornbills, a Yellow-rumped Thornbill and Crimson Chats were seen darting across the road and White-winged Trillers, Grey Butcherbirds and Babblers (Grey-crowned and White-browed) were often spotted alongside the road in dense thickets.

Examination of a permanent watercourse resulted in a Black-fronted Dotterel, Rainbow Bee-eaters, Sacred Kingfishers, Darters, a Little Pied Cormorant, an Egret, White-necked Heron, Grey Teal and a possible female Musk Duck which flew off upon our approach. In the field, Australian Bustards were regularly seen flying overhead, and a Rufous Whistler and a Black-tailed Treecreeper were both sighted in *Eucalyptus* trees on an ironstone ridge.

This was an exciting and memorable trip, and illustrates that for those willing to brave the intense heat and occasional

cyclonic rains, birding in the Pilbara is about as good as it gets.

Robert Davis

NEST DESTRUCTION BY BLACK-FACED CUCKOO-SHRIKE

On Saturday 27 January I observed what, for me, was a strange sight. We have a shack in Myalup and a huge tuart tree in the garden. Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes have recently nested in the tree. Earlier in the day a fairly well developed chick was sitting on a nearby branch. Later two kookaburras appeared and were 'bombed' by an irate adult Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike for about 10 minutes before the kookaburras flew away. There was no sign of the chick.

Late in the evening as the sun was setting I watched the adult Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike vigorously and systematically destroying its nest. Over the course of several minutes it picked off bits of the nest with its beak and tossed them to one side leaving a half destroyed nest. I do not know if there is any link between the earlier appearance of the kookaburras. I have never seen a bird deliberately damage its nest before. It was a curious experience.

Tom Jeffcote

ESPERANCE WEEKEND JANUARY 26-28 1996

This campout was a repeat of, and follow-up to, the very successful Hooded Plover count at Esperance in January 1995. The proceedings began with a meeting in Esperance late Thursday afternoon, when Kate Dawson, local (and highly enthusiastic) RAOU member briefed us on the program for the weekend.

On Friday morning sixteen members and friends drove to Coolinup Swamp, on a property belonging to Mr Bob Long. Bob met us at his homestead and guided us to the swamp. The property is run for cattle, but it is the intention of the owner to fence off the swamp and encourage it to regenerate. It has several areas of open water but also many eucalypts and some paperbarks growing in and around the water's edge. About two hours were spent here and seventeen species seen. Grey Teal were easily the commonest, with five Black-tailed Native-hens and a Yellow-billed Spoonbill also seen. No birds of prey or parrots were seen, and the common Yellow-throated Miners had seemingly driven all the bush birds away except for a few Willie Wagtails.

Nearer Esperance we stopped at the Mullet Lake complex where last year we had seen Hooded Plovers. None were seen this day, although large numbers of waterfowl were present including Chestnut Teal.

On Friday afternoon we visited Lake Benje Benjenup about 25 km northeast of Esperance. This salt lake is on the property of Mr Nils Blumann who accompanied us on a walk around the lake. A pair of Hooded Plovers greeted us as soon as we arrived, and careful observation of this pair was rewarded by the finding of a nest with three eggs and the observation of aggression between Hooded and Red-capped Plovers (See separate report below: Editors).

The other side of Lake Benje Benjenup produced a group of twelve Hooded Plovers, all of which had the dark heads of adult birds. There was much more water in the lake than at the same time last year, but the bird list was restricted to fourteen Hooded Plovers, a few Red-capped Plovers and a Wedge-tailed Eagle soaring over a clump of pine trees, which

contained a large stick nest.

On the way back some of the group detoured to Station Lake, and were well rewarded by seeing eighty four Hooded Plovers, twelve Yellow-billed Spoonbills, Red-necked Avocets and only the second record for the Esperance Shire of a Royal Spoonbill.

On Saturday morning twenty one people visited Lake Gore, west of Esperance, where 1500 Hooded Plovers were recorded in January '95, and where Mike Weston trapped and banded one hundred birds in February that year. We were guided to the lake by locals Kate Dawson and Mike Gibbs.

Arrival at the eastern side of the Lake gave a very different picture from the previous January, when after Esperance's driest year there was virtually no water in the lake. Now there was water as far as the eye could see, but still wide shallow areas with Hooded Plovers and other waders standing around, waiting to be counted. However, the problem with counting birds on large lakes still remained; that is getting close enough to identify the birds without making them fly off to another part of the lake, and having to start all over again. Two hours of careful counting produced a figure of 851 Hooded Plovers, including 27 immatures (3.2%) as well as the inevitable Australian Shelducks, Black-winged Stilts, Greenshanks, Red-necked Stints, a few Curlew Sandpipers, a single Grey Plover and one immature Whiskered Tern.

After morning tea we moved around the lake to the north side, and just where we parked the vehicles was a sand spit with a group of seventeen Hooded Plovers, including one immature bird. The suggestion that they would make a good photo was enough to make them immediately take flight. One should never voice such ideas out loud! Further walking along the lake edge produced another twenty two Hooded Plovers including two immatures.

"Lake Gore ... needs more protection"

We moved on to Lake Carbul, which was dry with no birds, and lunch was taken in the shelter of the Banksia trees. With the inner man satisfied we felt able to tackle the western side of Lake Gore and drove in that direction. After leaving the vehicles we saw a large number of birds further west, so off we went carrying the necessary but cumbersome telescopes. We saw innumerable Australian Shelduck, 300 Red-necked Avocets, 300 Hoary-headed Grebes, 70 Pink-eared Ducks, 50 Banded Stilts (none with leg flags) 30 Greenshanks and sixteen Australasian Shovelers, but no Hooded Plovers!

Lake Gore is a CALM reserve, with much fringing vegetation dying, probably due to salt encroachment, and perhaps other results of nearby farming. It is an important lake to many species, and may well be the most important in the Esperance area for Hooded Plovers. It needs more protection.

We moved to Lake Kubich which was virtually dry, with few birds. Gidon Lake was equally unrewarding, producing one Greenshank, an Australian Pelican and a distant wader which after much walking and discussion was agreed to be a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. The surrounding area was very dry with many bare paddocks, but *Banksia speciosa* was flowering and seemingly thriving wherever it was given the opportunity.

The Sunday followed the same format as last year, with

the option of going on the Mackenzie's MV Seabreeze to Woody Island, or staying on the mainland and going to lakes or beaches not already searched for Hooded Plovers. Thirteen people chose the boat trip, which took two hours to get to Woody Island and included many detours to various islands and rocks, to show some of the diversity of wildlife of the Recherche Archipelago.

As soon as we left the harbour, Flesh-footed Shearwaters appeared. They were magnificent to watch, gliding almost effortlessly in large circles behind the boat. They came so close it was easy to see the pink legs and feet and the pale bill, and to appreciate the speed at which they swooped down to the waves and up again. On the rocks and larger islands we saw Australian Seal Lions, small numbers of New Zealand Fur Seals (now recovering after near extinction last century), a large colony of Crested Terns, which Skipper Hugh MacKenzie said was increasing in size, a nesting pair of Black-faced Shags, a pair of White-bellied Sea-eagles and several Cape Barren Geese.

A demonstration of the learning skills of a particular Pacific Gull was fascinating. By throwing bread into the sea, large numbers of herrings were attracted towards the surface. Two Pacific Gulls, which had been standing on a rocky island, settled on the water and made a few desultory pecks at the fish. One of the gulls however, with a neat ducking of the head, grabbed a fish in its bill then flew back to its favourite rock. After some short lived flapping by the fish, the gull aligned it with its head pointing gullet down, and with one flick of the gull's head the fish (15-20 cm in length) disappeared. Apparently only one gull has ever caught fish in this way, and has been doing so for almost two years.

The ultimate highlight before reaching Woody Island was encountering a pod of dolphins, identified by our Skipper as Common Dolphins, *Delphinus delphis*, apparently common world wide. Groups of up to ten adults and several calves joined the boat, and would come from behind and swim past or underneath the boat, occasionally leaping completely out of the water. These marvellous creatures appeared to slide effortlessly through the water at great speed, calves as well, without moving a single muscle. It was wonderful to see them.

On Woody Island we saw fourteen species of birds, which included Rock Parrots and Red-eared Firetails. The island, like the whole Archipelago, is a CALM reserve and a part of it is leased to the MacKenzie family.

There are several colonies of Flesh-footed Shearwaters on the island with about 100 nests. The leaking tank which last year provided bush birds with easy water and birdwatchers much to look at and enjoy, has been repaired. Some of the abundant New Holland Honeyeaters were seen contorting themselves to get water which presumably condenses on the underside of a tin roof, suggesting how important access to fresh water is, in the life of these off-shore birds.

While the described excursions had been taking place, other areas had also been searched for Hooded Plovers, so that the Esperance district was covered fairly comprehensively. There had been much to do and see, but Hooded Plovers were the reason for travelling this far, and for the visit to Stokes Inlet by some members on the way home.

Numbers of Hooded Plovers reported for the trip are as follows, but these may not be final.

Lake Gore	930
Grass Patch lakes	83
Station Lake	84
Lake Benje Benjenup	14
Woody Lake	7
Windabout Lake	4
Esperance beaches	7
Stokes Inlet	91
Total	1220

It would be ideal if this area, Lake Gore in particular, could be monitored for Hooded Plovers over several years, perhaps quarterly to cover all seasons. Nest scrapes with eggs have been found at least from August to January and some immatures are seen at all times. Do they nest in all months of the year if conditions are suitable? We are also not sure of the time required for the birds to acquire the black head plumage.

The two excursions to Esperance have, I think, been an unqualified success. Thanks are due in great measure to the Esperance group, and in particular Kate Dawson, for the organisation, active participation and sacrifice of family time before and over this weekend. Thank you drivers, the bush plays havoc with the paintwork!

Thank you everyone for your contribution.

Max Bailey

PLOVER AGGRESSION

During the Hooded Plover weekend at Esperance (see above) an interesting example of interspecific aggression was observed on Lake Benje Benjenup. A pair of nesting Hooded Plovers, with three eggs, was seen on a wide sandy shore of the lake. One of this pair acted very aggressively towards three Red-capped Plovers, flying towards them and constantly harassing them. One of the Red-capped Plovers displayed broken wing behaviour, which seemed to result in particularly determined and fierce attacks from the Hooded Plover, from which the 'redcap' would escape at the last possible instant. This apparently diverted attention away from the two tiny 'redcap' runners which had appeared towards the end of the conflict. On two occasions, the Red-capped Plovers fluttered aggressively around the much larger Hooded Plover. The interaction continued for at least fifteen minutes.

Were both species instinctively protecting breeding territory (or eggs and young) too close to each other for comfort? Or do Hooded Plovers sometimes feed on vertebrate prey if it is small enough or disabled enough to be overpowered?

Max Bailey and John Blyth

HOODED PLOVERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA TO 31 MAY 1994

The Hooded Plover Project is an initiative of the RAOU (WA Group) in collaboration with Mike Weston who is conducting a study on the Hooded Plover in association with the national body of the RAOU. It is being undertaken because all sources emphasize that although this rare species is known to be declining in south-eastern Australia, there is insufficient information available about the status and ecology of the Hooded Plover in Western Australia.

Part of the project has been to collate records prior to the commencement of the project. Records have been obtained from various sources, principally *Western Australian*

Birdnotes, the Western Australian Museum, data collected for *The Atlas of Australian Birds* and for the survey *Waterbirds in Nature Reserves of South-western Australia*. The records date from 1901 to May, 1994, at the commencement of the Hooded Plover Project. The great majority of the records are post 1975.

These records were categorised into the regions shown on Figure 1 and are listed in Table 1. Locations are listed alphabetically within each region. Numbers on the top line of each box refer to the highest number of birds recorded at that location in a particular season (Summer = December, January, February). Only birds capable of flight are included in the total i.e. adults plus immatures or juveniles. If the number of birds observed was not recorded, the number is replaced by x. The year in which the highest number for each month was recorded is entered immediately after the source code. For example, m80 signifies that the record was made in 1980 and was obtained from the Western Australian Museum. An asterisk (*) is used to denote a record from a site near the first-named site within a box. This has been used where there is no overlap of records from the two sites.

Table 1: Historical records of the Hooded Plover in Western Australia to 31 May 1994. See text for details.

Abbreviations:

B = Breeding (eggs or runners)
b = Breeding recorded at this site another year
NP = National Park
NR = Nature Reserve
FR = Fitzgerald River
L = Lake
R = River

Major sources:

a = Data collected for *The Atlas of Australian Birds*
n = *Western Australian Bird Notes*
d = RAOU (WA Group) Database
s = *The Stilt*
e = *The Emu*
m = Western Australian Museum
w = South-western Australia Waterbird Usage Database 1981-1988
r = RAOU Nest Record Scheme

(Note: The sources listed are those from which the information was obtained and are not necessarily the original or only source of the record).

Other records are from individuals whose initials are used:

ac = Andrew Chapman	lh = Liz Houghton
as = Angela Sanders	mb = Max Bailey
bn = Brenda Newbey	mi = Mike Bamford
ga = George Agar	mn = Mavis Norgard
gm = Greg Marston	mw = M. Whackett
hs = Helen Start	pd = Perry deRebeira
jb = John Brooke	rs = Ray Schultz
je = Jack Ewart	sd = Stephen Davies
jh = Jenny Hunt	vd = Viv Dare
km = Karen McRoberts	wr = Bill Russell

LOCATION	Sum	Aut	Win	Spr
INLAND				
AGRICULTURAL - PASTORAL NORTHERN				
Bencubbin		x a78		
Brown L. (Campion wetlands)			6 w84	
Coorow- 20 km to E		2B sd90		2B r90
Goorly Lake; *10 km NE Goorly L.		x a78	*2 m62	
Hinds Lake. 5km NNE Piawanning				2 m03
Moora				x m57
Three Springs *Yarra Yarra L.		*x m16		5 m57
Wannamal - Bodey's Swamp	1 n88	1 n90		
Wannamal - Football Lake		1 w87		
Wannamal Lake * pond nearby		5 w82		*1 n85
Whitewells Station				x d89
Wongan Hills				x a03
Wubin. 24 km W; *36.5 km W			xB m71	*11 km93
AGRICULTURAL - SOUTHERN				
Ace Lake, Lake Ace NR		2 m85	3 w83	
Altham Lake (Chinocup Lakes)		2 w83		
Baandee				5 m55
Balicup L. 20 km ENE Cranbrook	x a78			3 w84
Beejenup NR 30526; 20 km SE Tambellup			2 w82	
Beenong. Milton Rd N. of L. Grace			xB m93	
Biddy Lake	2 w83			
Boxwood Hill	x a78	x a78	x a77	x a78
Cairlocup NR Cairlocup Lake		2 w83	3 w83	
Cairlocup NR Central Lake			2 w83	8b w82

Cairlocup NR West Lake		1 w84		
Camel Lake, 35 km E of Cranbrook				12 n84
Cemetery Lake, *L. Grace unspec	12 n84			*x a77
Chillinup NR 25386; Plantagen et				2 w83
Cranbrook NR 105				4 n81
Dalyup, 5 km N		x a78		
Dunn NR, Ski Lake	75 n89	5 w87	1 w87	104 n89
Ewlymartup Lake, Wagin		1 m73		
Grace Lake - North				3b w84
Grass Patch, 4 km SE	x a80	x a80	x a79	x a80
Grass Patch NR 28300 (12 km E)		9 w85		
Halbert Lake, Mt Ridley			xB a79	
Kau NR 32776, S of Kau Rock				2 w84
King Lake			2 m55	
Kondinin Lake		2 w84		
Magenta Lake				3 m72
Mailalup NR 26264 S. Lake				3 w83
Mears Lake NR Brookton Shire			2 w82	
Munglinup, 10 km ESE	103 n88			
Newdegate; #2 km E.; *19 km E		*6 m66	#4 n84	x a77
Newdegate, 22 km S. Small salt lake				2 m63
Pallarup Lake, S of L. King			6 w82	25 w85
Pingrup *Small salt pan 8 km N.	*2 m59	x a78		
Pootenup Lake NR				1 w83
Salt Lake NR 25812; 25 km E Cranbrook L. 1				2B w83

Salt Lake NR 25812 Lake 2				2 w81
Stirling Range NP, *Two Mile Lake	x a78	2 n87	x a11	*2 n88
Three Swamps NR 26162; 25 km SE Tambellup				12 w84
Truslove NR 27985				2 w84
Whitewater L., Nonalling wetlands			2 w82	
Yenyening West Lake, Beverley				1 w83
GOLDFIELDS - NORTHERN				
Arrow Lake, 25 km N. Kalgoorlie		4 ac92		x a80
Barlee Lake - Mt Elvire				2 ac92
Deborah Lake			2B m81	2 m89
Pindabunna Homestead dam			x lh92	
GOLDFIELDS - SOUTHERN				
Near Boorabbin NP, ca. 1 km E				2 cn89
Dundas Lake		2 m05	2B e04	
Newman Rock - Salt-lake to E.		4 jh92	2 n92	
Norseman - ca. 45 km NW				2B mi84
SOUTHWEST				
Kwornicup Lake			2 w81	
COASTAL				
SOUTH COAST - EASTERN				
Beaufort Inlet bar, Pallinup R.	6+ e26	2 pd76		2 a77
Benje-Benjenup Lake			100B je86	50 n88
Cape le Grande NP	x d90			
Cape Paisley, 17 km NE	30 m86			x a80

Cape Riche				x a77
Cheyne Beach				8 m63
Coramup Creek Warden Wetlands	4 w86			
Cordinup R. Mouth				5 m63
Dempster Inlet FRNP				2 bn85
Esperance unspec.	x a80	x a79	x a81	1 m38
Ewen's Lake Mullet Lake NR	21 w82	8 w86		1 w85
Eyre Bird Obs. beach-Twilight Cove				3 m80
Fitzgerald Inlet FRNP	38 n94			2 bn85
FRNP unspec.	x a77	x a78		
Gidon Lake Gidon Wetlands	1 w85	237 w85	88 w85	
Gordon Inlet FRNP	56 bn86	33 bn88		2 bn85
Gore Lake (Gage)	393 w83	315b w82	105 w82	115 w83
Gore-Quallilup Swamps				3 w83
Gull Rock Beach, Albany				xB m67
Hamersley Bar FRNP				4 bn86
Hopetoun	x a79	x a78		xB a77
Israelite Bay	1 m85			
Israelite Bay to Wattle Camp	14 m86			113 s86
Jerdacuttup West Lake				11 w83
Karbul Lake, Gidon Wetlands		232 w88	2 w83	260 m88
Kubitch Lake, Gidon Wetlands	72 w86	350 m88	4 w83	1 w82
Mason Bay				8 as93
Mullet Lake, Mullet Lake NR	39 w83			
Mylies Beach, FRNP				2 bn86
Nanarup, Taylor Inlet	x a80		xB m72	xB m73
Norman's Beach, Albany			xB m77	3b m63

Oldfield Estuary		2 w86		
Parriup Centre L Shaster wetlands		1 w86		
Pink Lake, Esperance	38 gm9 2	x m48		3 mn93
Point Ann, FRNP		6 bn86		
Pt Malcolm clay- pan 3 km NW	2 m86	x a80		
Quoin Head, FRNP	4 m75	x a78		2B r74
Racecourse L., Warden wetlands	8 w83	3 w83	1 w83	
Recherche Archipelago	x a21			
Sandy Bight, Cape Arid NP		x a80		
Shark Lake, Esperance area	x m44			
Shaster Lake		1 w85	4 w83	7 w83
Station Lake Mullet Lake NR	99b w84	91b m89	16 w85	63b w83
Stokes Inlet, Stokes NP		45 n90		
Two Peoples Bay	1 m62			4 m63
Varley Lake			x a80	
Warden Lake, Warden wetlands	240 w85	539 w88	127 w85	65 w82
Wattle Camp		x a80	2 a78	2 m85
Wellstead Estuary, Bremer Bay	xB m82	26 n93	xB m78	
White Lake, Esperance		140 w87		
Windabout Lake, Warden wetlands	1 w84		8 w85	6 w83
Yokinup Bay, Cape Arid NP	6 n90	6 ga94		1 bn80
SOUTH COAST - WESTERN				
Albany Harbour	x a77			
Augusta	2 n82	x a81	x a77	x a77
Broke Inlet				xB m31

D'Entrecasteaux NP, Donelly R. mouth	x a78			x a77
Irwin Pt; Conspicuous Beach	x a81	1 vd93		
Ledge Point - 2 km E Augusta	1 m57			
Nornalup Inlet, Rocky Head	4 n87	2 hs89		x a77
Ocean Beach; Wilson Inlet	6 m83	x a80	x a78	2 jb85
Parry Inlet	2 vd92		1 w88	x a79
Torbay-Perkins Beach	5 n83	x m05	x a81	x a10
West Cape Howe NP				x d90
Windy Harbour		1 rs91		
WEST COAST- NORTHERN				
Abrolhos Is. N. North Island		9 m73		1 m74
Abrolhos Is. N. W. Wallabi Island			1 m59	
Abrolhos Is. S. Gun Island				1 m80
Abrolhos Is. S. Pelsaert Island	x a81			1 m80
Drovers Cave NP -salt lake				59 m82
Lancelin		1 n86		
Leeman Lake, 5 km N Leeman		6 m64		
Port Gregory Beach				1 m57
Wooramel R. /NW Hwy			x a77	
WEST COAST- SOUTHERN				
Alfred Cove NR	1 n93	1 n93		x a78
Bhagdad Lake, Rottneest Is	3 n89			
Busselton, *Vasse	x a78	x a79		*x a02
Canal Rocks area		6 rs83		
Cape Clairault	x a80	x a78	x a77	
Cape Freycinet			xB m77	xB a77

Cape Leeuwin	x a78	2 n94		x a77
Cape Naturaliste			2 n93	xB a80
Clifton Lake	1 n93	2 w87	2 w86	5 w87
Cosy Corner, S of Hamelin Bay	2 n89			
Cowaramup Bay		4 n88	2 m93	x a77
Ellensbrook	xB m01			x m01
Forrestdale Lake	1 w88	1 w87		
Hamelin Bay	5 n83			
Herdsmen Lake				3 mw90
Jandabup Lake, Wanneroo	5 m79			
Margaret R. mouth - Cape Mentelle	2 n89	3 jb84	x a80	x a77
Moses Rock - Beach			x a80	
Peel Inlet, Coodanup	2 n84	1 w82		1 n92
Pelican Point, Crawley	1 mb7 3	4 mb7 5		1 mb93
Rockingham district, 'White' Lake		2 m42		
Rottnest Is - unspecified	x a47	x m65		x m65
Two Rocks, Yanchep				1 n86
Woodman Point	11 m57	4 m56		
Yalgorup NP, Hayward Lake		2 wr91	1 wr90	
Yalgorup NP, Martin's Tank	2 wr94			
Yalgorup NP, Newnham Lake	3 wr94	3 wr94		
Yalgorup NP, Pollard Lake		2 wr94		
Yalgorup NP, Preston Lake	29 wr94	44b n94	2 wr85	6 wr85
Yalgorup NP, Yalgorup Lake	1 wr93			
Yallingup - Smith Beach	2 m22	6 rs83		xB a80

Historical records of the Hooded Plover in Western Australia extend north to the Wooramel River, north-east to the Kalgoorlie area and east to Eyre Bird Observatory (Fig. 1, Table 1). Both locations and numbers are higher coastally (Table 2) with the major centre being around Esperance. However, Table 2 should be interpreted with caution as it may show as much about when and where bird watchers have been operating as about actual Hooded Plover locations.

Table 2: Locations of Hooded Plovers in Western Australia according to season and nearness to coast.

	summer	autumn	winter	spring
Coastal	60	53	31	62
Inland	10	24	23	36
Totals	70	77	54	98

Although there are remarkably few breeding records, breeding has been recorded in all seasons. Of the 167 locations listed, breeding has been recorded at only 24. Breeding has been recorded only coastally in summer but both coastally and inland in the other seasons with the majority of records being in spring and coastal.

Additional information: If you have information that would add to these records of maximum numbers by season prior to commencement of the Hooded Plover Project (1 June 1994), please forward them to The Hooded Plover Project, c/o RAOU (WA Group) at Perry House.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to members who searched through their records, Ron Johnstone (W.A. Museum), Julie Raines (RAOU), and fellow members of the Hooded Plover Project team.

Brenda Newbey

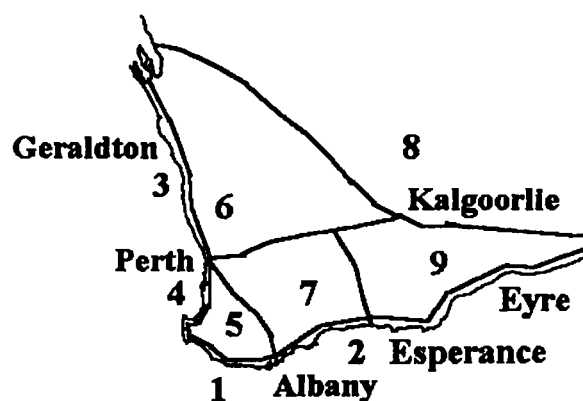


Figure 1: Regions used to categorise Hooded Plover records:

- 1 = South Coast - West
 - 2 = South Coast - East (E of Albany)
 - 3 = West Coast - North (N of Quinns)
 - 4 = West Coast - South
 - 5 = South-west
 - 6 = Agricultural-Pastoral (North)
 - 7 = Agricultural - South
 - 8 = Goldfields - North
 - 9 = Goldfields - South
- (Coastal = to 20 km inland)

CALLS IN THE NIGHT

The Canning river runs at the back of my property in Thornlie. Lining the river banks are old established gum trees, many containing large hollows. Adjacent to the river are areas of open parkland and pockets of wetland. In years past, the familiar sound of the Southern Boobook (*Ninox novaeseelandiae*) was often heard late into the evening along this stretch of river. Even the Barn Owl would put in an occasional appearance. However, both ceased to appear and this was generally thought to be due to the ever increasing urban sprawl. Remnants of natural bush and overgrown paddocks slowly turned into quarter acre blocks. Then, one cold winter evening in 1994, the call of the Boobook was heard again behind historic "Maddington Park". Maddington Park was one of the Swan River Colony's first land grants along the Canning River. First thoughts were that it might be a transient visitor but as the months went by it became a regular caller. All indications were that a Boobook had returned and established a territory in one of its old haunts. The close proximity of the owl's territory provided a golden opportunity to keep detailed records. Following are some of the notes taken.



Southern Boobook

During the month of July the Boobook started to call in earnest (Figure 1). Calls were most frequent early in the season and lasted for extended periods. The opposite occurred in late October and November when calling became intermittent and often restricted to only a few calls. A number of regular calling sites were identified, mostly along the river. These vantage points were in elevated positions, for example, high in a tree or on a rise in terrain. This may allow calls to carry further. Calls were audible over a distance of more than 500 metres, which seems surprising in a suburban environment. The majority of all calls registered (72%) were in the vicinity of the suspected breeding site. If this is standard behaviour the main calling site could well be near the nest.

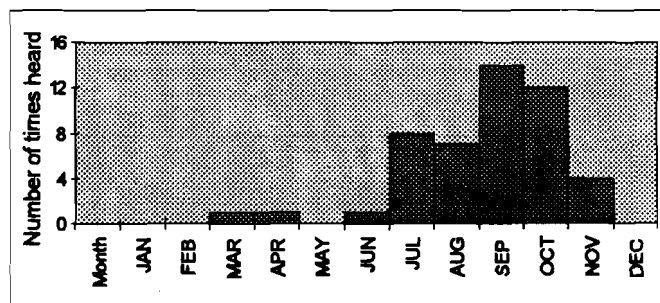


Figure 1: Frequency of calling throughout the year by the Southern Boobook in the Thornlie area, 1994-95.

The Boobook displayed a strong loyalty to its calling perches. After one severe storm, an old gum tree, from which the owl often called, had half its crown blown away. The owl nevertheless remained faithful to this site even though it was now clearly exposed. However, towards the end of the season the owl did seem to loose its attachment to the regular sites and tended to roam the area.

Weather conditions did not influence the calling behaviour; the Boobook could be heard calling regardless of weather conditions. The repetitive "mopoke" was heard on cold and warm nights, when strong easterly winds were blowing, during full moon, new moon and even light rain. Nothing seemed to phase the Boobook as this entry shows.- "24 June 1995, 10.20pm. Heavy downpours still the Boobook continues to call even though a thunder and lighting storm rages all around."

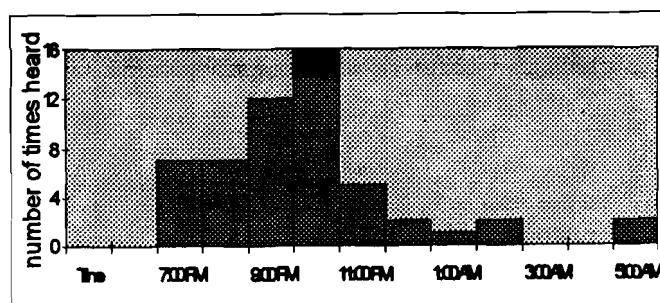


Figure 2: Frequency of calling during the night by the Southern Boobook in the Thornlie area, 1994-95.

One calling site was in a gum tree close to Burslem Drive (Maddington). The noise emanating from a steady flow of traffic and a nearby railway line did not disturb the Boobook. It would also usually ignore my presence beneath its tree and continue to call.

The frequency of calls varied. My records show a range of 18 calls a minute up to 40 calls a minute. Some nights calls just seemed to come more slowly. Most people will be familiar with the classic "mopoke" call of the Boobook. Another call is a rapid "por, por, por, por". Hollands (1991) (page 209) states: "This is a call between mated birds but its use is not confined to the breeding season. Mostly used by the male but also by the female." At the Canning River the "por, por, por" call was only noted on three occasions from the end of August to mid September. The call emanated from within a hollow tree limb. The direct transition from the "mopoke" call to the "por, por, por" call was registered and vice versa. The transition between the different call types occurred without

interruption.

The data shows that the Boobook was calling most actively between the hours 9.00pm to 11.00pm and during the months July till October (Figures 1, 2). However, it should be noted that, for obvious reasons, few observations were made in the second half of the night.

Observing the owls was most successful during full moon, when the available light was sufficient to allow the use of binoculars. Watching a Boobook, silhouetted against a rising full moon, makes for a memorable experience.

Reference:

Hollands, D. 1991. Birds of the Night; Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia. Reed, Balgowlah, NSW.

Marcus Singer

Country Groups

ESPERANCE

Mosquitoes, Whales and Ground Parrots

A very small contingent of members from the Esperance Bird Observers Group (EBOG) enjoyed the weekend of 7-8 October 1995 at Cape Arid National Park, in search of the Ground Parrot.

After setting up camp at the Thomas River campsite on Saturday afternoon, a walk along the beach revealed two Hooded Plovers, Crested Terns and Caspian Tern, as well as Sooty Oystercatchers feeding on nearby rocks.

As their name suggests, Ground Parrots spend most of their time on or near the ground in dense scrub and seldom call. This makes observation of these rare birds difficult. A good time to listen for them is at dawn and dusk. This is what we did.

To familiarise ourselves with their call, taped recordings of Ground Parrots were listened to in the afternoon and played at the observation points to invoke a reply. With not a breath of wind and clear skies (perfect weather for listening for Ground Parrots), we positioned ourselves at dusk along a firebreak running west off the Thomas River Road. As the sun set and the sounds of diurnal birds slowly faded, the buzzing of hundreds of mosquitoes and the constant movement of our hands to ward them off, made listening for Ground Parrots a night to remember. With no success members were in bed early that night for the dawn listening session.

We were up before dawn next morning and positioned ourselves along the approach to and at the park's rubbish tip. Not a mosquito was to be heard (thank goodness), but the likely call of three Ground Parrots was heard for five minutes only at the rubbish tip. The National Park Ranger had flushed a Ground Parrot from the approach track 12 months ago, which is a new location for the park.

A walk along the beach and rocks after breakfast was rewarding, for three Southern Right Whales with calves were only 40 metres from the rocks.

Allan Rose

Notices

SUBURBAN BIRD SURVEY

The WA Group is starting an exciting new project for members – and you don't even need to leave your garden!

We propose to conduct a survey of birds in the suburbs. Initially we will cover the Perth metropolitan area, but intend to broaden the scope of the project to include other townships and urban centres of the state.

The Database of WA Birds currently holds reports of sightings in specific, defined areas of the state, including areas that lie within the urban areas. There is, however, no comprehensive cover of sightings across the whole of the metropolitan area or other urban areas.

This survey will provide the required data and, over time, trends in bird populations and their movements may be detected. Any detected trends then may be used in the formulation of conservation and urban management plans, or as evidence of the need for remedial action.

The current plan is for a summary of the results to date to be published regularly in *WA Bird Notes*. The results published in this way may identify 'observer-free' suburbs and provide an incentive to fill the gaps quickly.

How to Participate

1. Select a particular day each week as your 'observation' day, for example, Saturday.
2. Record, on the record sheet provided with this Bird Notes, all birds seen in or around your garden (within 100 metres) on your selected day with –
A 'tick' to indicate that the bird was seen on the selected day
An 'F' to indicate the bird was in Flight over the garden
An 'O' to indicate the bird was seen Outside the selected day, but during the week between this selected day and the next. That is, the selected day is the first day of the recorded week.
3. Repeat this each week on your selected day for one month.
4. Each month ensure your completed record sheet contains your name, address and phone number, and that the month is clearly identified, and submit your record sheet to me –
 - by hand, at the monthly group meeting
 - at the RAOU office at Perry House, or
 - by mail, to 71 Oceanic Drive, Floreat 6014.

If you wish to record a local reserve or area of bushland, then please do. Just follow the same steps listed above, but give a clear address for the area you choose to survey.

If you wish to do both, even better. Just remember to submit separate record sheets for each area that you survey. (For extra data sheets, please photocopy your blank data sheet, if possible. If not, others are available at Perry House.)

All of your records will add to our knowledge, but by following a regular routine as outlined above, we hope that the data will prove more valuable by enabling us to compare bird populations over time and from area to area.

Clive Nealon

LEG FLAGGED BANDED STILTS

In April-May, metal bands were placed on 500 Banded Stilts and metal bands and yellow leg flags were placed on a further 500, all in the Lake Ballard area (see WABN 74, p. 3 and Wingspan 5(2): 13-15, June 1995). The aim is to gather data on timing and direction of dispersal away from breeding areas, and subsequent movements.

To date (early February '96), only two leg-flagged stilts have been sighted away from the breeding areas: one at a small salt lake near Kalgoorlie in September and one at Herschell Lake on Rottnest Island on 20/1/96.

RAOU members are requested to watch out for Banded Stilts wearing leg flags. The bands and flags were placed above the 'knee' and are most visible when the birds are foraging. For each observation, the following information is required:

- location
- date and time of observation
- name(s) and contact details of observer(s)
- total number of Banded Stilt seen at the location
- estimate of % of birds with chestnut chest bands
- number of Banded Stilts with yellow leg flags, and those with metal bands, seen at the location
- whether or not the flagged stilts have chestnut chest bands

Numbers, date and location are the most important information to note. Also, if you have examined Banded Stilts for flags and not found them, this is also valuable information.

Please send records to Grant Pearson, Wildlife Research Centre, Dept CALM, PO Box 51, Wanneroo 6065, or telephone (09) 405 5100, fax (09) 306 1641.

CONSERVING AUSTRALIA'S THREATENED BIRDS

The RAOU, in conjunction with the Australian Nature Conservation Agency, has just established a threatened bird network to conserve Australia's 127 species and sub-species of threatened birds.

The network aims to link and strengthen the actions of species recovery teams around Australia, and in particular, to encourage community participation in urgent conservation tasks.

Over 2000 discrete tasks await adoption by the community, tasks developed by teams of scientists and community members expert in particular species requirements. Actions range from searching remote areas of Cape York for Golden-shouldered Parrots, to guarding nest sites of Little Terns on the beaches of south-eastern Australia.

Anyone wishing to help should contact Michael Fendley at RAOU Melbourne. Below are updates on two threatened species occurring in WA.

Gouldian Finch

For the first time information is coming to light on the bird's Wet season movements, with observations near Katherine (NT) suggesting that birds move from the hills to the flats to seek out seeding, perennial grasses along creeks and around depressions.

Population numbers appear to be down at Yinberrie in the Northern Territory, but further monitoring is required. Waterhole counts across the Top End are planned for late September-early October 1996, at which time volunteer

assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Glen Holmes is chasing up leads in Queensland with the objective of locating a good population for intensive study. Any sightings by Queensland birders would be very useful.

Malleefowl

A most successful national conference was held in Adelaide in September 1995. Although Malleefowl range and numbers appear to be declining, there is hope that this can be arrested. Energetic recovery work is going on in several areas, with Western Australia lucky enough to have a Malleefowl shire and faunal emblem (Gnowangerup Shire – apparently 'Gnow' is Aboriginal for Malleefowl), and a dynamic Malleefowl Preservation Group numbering 250 financial members, with the natty T-shirt slogan of "It's Gnow or never".



Encouraging news has been received from South Australia where the number of active mounds in Bakara Conservation Park has increased from 9-16 over the last four years. Increased breeding density is attributable, at least in part, to a cooperative fox and rabbit control program implemented by local landholders, volunteers and Department of Environment and Natural Resources staff.

Joe Benshemesh is extending the Recovery Team's grid monitoring system in Victoria and would welcome help in setting up grids in the Little Desert area. Other volunteers will be needed shortly to carry out similar extension of the system throughout the bird's range.

Michael Fendley

NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined the RAOU WA Group between 23 October 1995 and 24 January 1996. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

E P Anderson, C and J Andrews, R Bernardo, J Bonomelli, M and A Buckman, C Chodorowski, P Comerford, A R Fergie, Mr and Mrs R S Ferguson, A Fincham, T and H Galluccio, J Gonat, M Gale, N Hogstrom, P Hyndes, D Blyth, D Jonas, T P Kemp, A and B King, M R Kollinger, J and R Luyer, H Macarthur, J D Massey, B, S and S Mee, S and J Miller, J Mills, S T Murray, U Neumann, K Peggs, J M Price, R D Moore, M Pudovskis, T Reynolds, A G Robertson, K Saunders,

R Rowell, A Schwartz, U Seydel, I Tarnay, K Taylor, W and M Tucker, E and U Wakefield, J and C Warner, A Webley, R and J Williams

Margaret Philippson

PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

The following reports/journals/books have been received October 1995 - January 1996:

Raptor Identification, Field Guide to the Identification of Australian Birds of Prey. Gordon Beruldsen. Queensland. 1995

The Bird Observer. Bird Observers Club of Australia. No 758, November 1995

Common Birds of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Goldfields Naturalists Club Inc. 1995

Narpullingup News. Fitzgerald River National Park Association Newsletter. October 1995

The Greener Times. Conservation Council of WA Inc. October 1995

Educational-Scientific Use of Wetlands and Rivers in the Busselton-Walpole Region. WA Water Authority. July 1995

Recreational Use of Waters Bodies in the Busselton-Walpole Region. WA Water Authority. July 1995

WATSNU. Newsletter of the WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit, Dept of CALM. Vol 2, Issue 2, October 1995

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, Draft Management Plan. Dept of CALM and National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority. 1995

Annual Report, 1994-1995. Dept of CALM

Wanjerri Nature Reserve, Draft Management Plan. Dept of CALM and National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority. 1995

The Bird Observer. Bird Observers Club of Australia. No 759, December 1995/January 1996

CALM News, September/October 1995 and November/December 1995

Emu. Journal of RAOU. Vol 95, Part 4, December 1995 (includes Supplement to *The Auk*, *The Emu* and *The Ibis*)

Projects and Publications, RAOU 1977-1994. Michelle Rice. RAOU, Melbourne, 1994

Newsletter, Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc. Vol 17, No 3, November/December 1995

The Tattler. Newsletter of the Australasian Wader Studies Group. No 5, November 1995

RGC Wetlands Centre, Capel. December 1995 report
Newsletter, South Australian Ornithological Association Inc. September 1995 and December 1995

Environmental Review. Western Power. 1995

The Greener Times. Conservation Council of WA Inc. January 1996

Helen Clark, Librarian

EXCURSIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

The Excursions Sub-committee meets quarterly to arrange excursions as published in the Bird Notes. If you would send back the questionnaire included with this Bird Notes with your opinion, it would assist us to organise excursions that suit as many people as possible.

We would like you to tell us about areas to which you regularly go birdwatching and which may be of interest to

other members.

If you have only one questionnaire for two people, mark the same form using a different colour pen.

It will be helpful for you to read the following item "Instructions for Excursion Leaders" before completing the questionnaire.

Bill McRoberts

Bryan Barrett

Clive Napier

Sue Abbotts

GUIDELINES FOR EXCURSION LEADERS

Although these are not hard and fast rules, by observing most of them your outings should run smoothly and enjoyably for everyone.

Shortly before the date of the excursion, you should walk over the proposed route to ensure you know the way, how long the walk will take, and what birds are likely to be seen.

If possible, wear a name tag; take a few copies of *Birding in WA* brochures for distribution to new members and visitors; have available a copy of the current *WA Bird Notes* (for coming events, etc); and have a field guide handy.

Arrive at the meeting place well ahead of the advertised starting time. At that time, call everyone together, introduce yourself, welcome everyone, and ask if there are any new members or visitors. If so, welcome them, offer them a brochure, and suggest they accompany a more experienced member who should help them to identify birds and meet other members.

Briefly tell the group a little about the area to be walked (eg, type of trees, vegetation, topography, and difficulties, if any, to be encountered) and the birds likely to be seen. Describe the route, how long it will take, and what time to return to the starting place. If going to another area later, explain where you will be going, how far away, and how long you expect to be there.

If there are more than 10 people, divide them into smaller groups and ask for experienced members to lead them. Perhaps the groups could cover different areas, as long as the leaders know the area. Suggest everyone keeps the leader in sight so as to avoid getting lost.

The leaders should stay in front to locate birds and help members of the group see and identify them. If possible have an experienced birder at the tail end as well.

If it is necessary to travel in convoy, make sure drivers know the rules! Keep the car **BEHIND** you in **SIGHT** and know the car in front; stop at turn-offs from major highways until all cars have caught up. Tell everyone, before leaving, where you are going and how long it will take. This applies particularly to long distances when it is possible that the convoy will become separated and that drivers may run short of petrol and need to stop for a refill!

On returning to the starting place at the designated time, gather everyone together and go through a checklist of birds with the group and record the species seen. This list should be forwarded to the Excursions Organiser as soon as possible after the outing.

Thank the participants for coming and make sure before you leave that everyone has returned and that no-one is in trouble - such as 'car won't start'!

You (or someone delegated by you) should write a brief report of the excursion as soon as possible after the outing

and send it to the Editor of *WA Bird Notes*.

Excursions Sub-committee

WANTED – BIRD BANDING EQUIPMENT

Any retired bird banders wishing to sell their gear, please contact Rita Watkins, RMB 218, Cranbrook 6321, or phone/fax (098) 26 7014.

Snippets

AWSG WADER CONFERENCE *SHOREBIRD CONSERVATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION*

Final Reminder

The Conference will be held over the weekend of 16/17 March 1996 at the Queensland Museum, South Brisbane. A dinner is planned for the Saturday evening giving participants the opportunity to meet and socialise with wader enthusiasts from around the globe.

UNRAVELLING PAVEL'S KNOT

Is it possible to observe an individual colour-banded bird four times over a period of one year? Is it possible if this bird is a migratory wader among 10 000 individuals which visit the area each year? Is it possible for the bird to be seen twice in Siberia in consecutive breeding seasons? Yes!

- Pavel Tomkovich banded a female Great Knot in Siberia, June 1994.
- Becky observed her three times at the same beach in Roebuck Bay, WA, September 1994.
- An observer saw her again in Siberia, June 1995.
- Becky saw the same bird, again, 100 metres from Broome Bird Observatory in October 1995.

We thought this to be an amazing example of a bird returning to almost the exact location in two hemispheres. However, we then caught a Great Knot by cannon-net in September 1995 at Quarry Beach. This bird was carrying a band put on its leg 14 years earlier (during the first AWSG North-west Expedition). Where? Quarry Beach! As this bird was over one year old at the time of banding it is also the oldest recorded Great Knot so far at 15+ years.

Other banding records suggest that the birds are returning to preferred beaches and our retraps have often been banded at the same site many years before.

Jon Fallow and Becky Hayward
(From *The Tattler*, November 1995)

A TANGLE OF RED KNOTS

It has been known for some time that Red Knots visiting Australia breed on the Chukotski Peninsula. However, Pavel Tomkovich has theorised for some time that there are in fact two distinct populations visiting Australia, based on plumage differences. This appears to have been confirmed by a recent observation of a flagged Red Knot near Broome Bird Observatory which was banded at Novosibirskije Ostrova (New Siberian Islands) in July 1994. The Wrangle Island population, in between these two populations, for some reason migrates to the US!

(From *The Tattler*, November 1995)

Excursion and Observatory Reports

EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY (Report for December 1995)

On a recent trip to Cocklebidy, we were lucky enough to witness an amazing display by a group of Australian Bustards. Dusk was beginning to fall, when we saw three males, a female and two half-grown young birds, in a clear area amongst blue-bush and scattered mallee, on the Hampton Tableland, just 500 m south of the Eyre Highway. The males had distended throats with long, white feathers reaching the ground in front, like a long beard. Their wings were held out from the body and tails raised. Two rushed together and grasping each other by the beak, began "neck wrestling". The third male attempted to join in, by jumping in the air and landing beside them, but they quickly sent him flying on his way. The two continued to wrestle for about 10 minutes, until one manoeuvred his head into the superior position and the other gave up and flew off. The victor approached the female bird, but she took off too and flew about 50 m away! He continued strutting around, making occasional noises and looking in the direction of the vanquished bird, who was still hanging around. By this time it had become almost too dark to see and the necessity to collect our stores from the delivery truck forced us reluctantly to leave, but feeling very lucky to have come along just at the right time to see what we did.

Welcome Swallows are nesting around the house and garage now and it is very entertaining watching the young ones hatching out and learning to fly. One had the misfortune to fall into a bucket of water, but a careful drying out with a hair dryer had him recovered again. The parents are excellent providers, with a constant supply of moths being brought to the young in the nests. Occasionally, large flocks of Tree Martins are seen and a few Fairy Martins joined them for a couple of days recently. A pair of Dusky Woodswallows have a nest in a dead tree stump on the dunes, in a completely exposed location, which now has three downy chicks in it. Dusky Woodswallows are usually only occasional visitors.

Some interesting sightings recently have been three Cockatiels, Crimson Chats, Budgerigars, Rock Parrots, Horsfield's and Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, White-winged Trillers, Brown Songlarks, Little Button-quails, Masked Woodswallows, and a lone Crested Pigeon. On the beach, a few migratory waders are making an appearance, including Pacific Golden Plovers. Two Whiskered Terns were recorded on the last Beach Count.

"People doing the Malleefowl Course
have just arrived ... very jubilant"

Bird Banding and Malleefowl Studies Courses are being run at present. As there are quite a few species of birds breeding, the banding is particularly interesting, seeing the juvenile birds in the hand and being able to make comparisons with adult birds. People doing the Malleefowl Course have just arrived back for lunch, at time of writing, very jubilant,

having caught and colour-banded a Malleefowl at the mound. This makes seven banded over the last 2-3 years, which will make it much easier to ascertain their territories and discover which birds are using which mounds.

The beach, which is covered with seaweed in winter, is clearing and will soon have transformed into a wide sandy stretch. On a recent trip to Twilight Cove we watched a Southern Right Whale cow and calf only about 50 m from the shore. The calf was rising almost half out of the water, then crashing back, moving around its mother in what looked like play – a fascinating sight!

After three years here, we are leaving Eyre in two weeks' time. Although it's good to start a new phase of life, we will miss the peace and beauty of Eyre, the interesting, friendly people and the daily involvement with birds and nature and perhaps even the weather recording! Our replacements, Phillip Sharples and Joye Wilson, are settling in and we hope they have as happy a stay as we did. Thanks to our Committee for their continued support, the RAOU staff, our course leaders and to all others who gave us friendship and advice. We wish everyone a happy Christmas and all the best for 1996.

George and Rita Watkins

Editors' note: This contribution arrived too late for the last issue, because of a very hectic change-over period as the new wardens took over. The WA Group thanks George and Rita for their efforts at Eyre, and wishes them well for the future.

FOCUS ON BIRDS (SUMMER): EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY, 7-13 January

1. A Report from a participant

It was with the encouragement of Peter Sandilands, our course leader, and with some apprehension, that I set off on Saturday 6 January at 6.30 am from Perth for this course at Eyre Bird Observatory. After a 17-hour bus journey with numerous stops on the way, we arrived at Cocklebidy at 10.50 pm (CWT) and spent the night in the Wedgetail Inn. At 8.00 am the following morning I was met by Philip Sharples, the warden, and driven the 32 km to the observatory, a 1½-hour journey over terrain where only a 4-wheel-drive can go. Believe it or not, we saw a pair of rare Blue Bonnets on the way.

Joye Wilson, the other warden, was there to greet us and later, two others, Viv Dare and Win Byrne who had driven down from Perth, joined us on the course. It would have been better perhaps to have had a few more on the course but nevertheless Peter kept us working hard. He had organised everything extremely well. Each evening we were briefed on where he planned to search next day, and what birds he expected us to see, using slides to help with identification. All birds seen each day were checked and recorded, with relevant matters discussed and any questions answered.

On birdwatching expeditions one can never guarantee to see any particular bird, but on this occasion we managed to identify (see or hear) 60 species, common or uncommon, on the selected sites. Some highlights for me included a Red-capped Robin at "Burnabbie", a derelict old station and a rich site for birdlife; a family of Emus, an adult with three young on Kanidal Beach; a pair of Chestnut Quail-thrush in the mallee scrub; a Malleefowl near its active mound which we

were able to inspect (after the bird had disappeared!). And, of course, a fleeting glimpse of the Blue Bonnets! On the last day we had the chance to become involved in some mist netting of local birds around the observatory, and later have a close look at them, and do some banding.

Accommodation facilities at the observatory are good; meals are excellent and beds comfortable. An added and unexpected bonus was the very good and extensive library – The Anderson Collection – covering a variety of subjects from philosophy to ornithology. The wardens were welcoming, helpful and caring of our physical well being.

In conclusion, it was a memorable week. For the experienced or inexperienced ornithologist in search of the "sound of silence" "far from the madding crowd", I can recommend highly a visit to Eyre Bird Observatory.

Tom Spalding

FOCUS ON BIRDS (SUMMER), 7-13 January

2. Report from leader

Although not as well attended as the previous course in the series, this was the most successful in terms of number of species recorded. Brief glimpses of less common species such as Malleefowl, Mulga Parrot, Southern Whiteface and Chestnut Quail-thrush kept the mood buoyant even when little was recorded at some of the fixed sites. Four people plus Eyre Bird Observatory's wardens recorded the birds at 10 sites located in the Nuytsland Nature Reserve between the Eyre Highway and the coast. Species regularly recorded (seven or more sites) included Yellow-rumped Pardalote (sub-species of Spotted), White-browed Scrubwren, Weebill, Inland Thornbill, Grey Butcherbird, Grey Currawong and Australian Raven. Less common species recorded included Brown Goshawk, Brown Falcon, Jacky Winter, Red-capped Robin, Southern Scrub-robin, Varied Sittella, Crested Bellbird and Grey Fantail. The species seen at the most sites was the Inland Thornbill while the most numerous was the Weebill. Fifty-two species of birds, three of mammals and five of reptiles were recorded at the sites. The short banding session held at the end of the course saw 32 birds of four species processed including seven retraps.

Overall, participants in Focus on Birds (Summer) obtained good views of between 55 and 65 species of birds while improving their recognition of calls and flight patterns. The data gathered during the course was a valuable contribution to this ongoing project. The next one in the series will be conducted in October 1996.

Peter Sandilands

BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY

Just before the new year we had an excited phone call from Pam Masters in Derby to say that Sister Pat Comeford had spied an 'interesting' wagtail at the wharf early on 30 December, while waiting to go on a mudcrabbing expedition. After consulting field guides and further observations the next morning, Pam and Pat were confident that it was a Black-backed Wagtail, *Motacilla lugens*. Pat had observed two individuals on one occasion, but only one remained, a female, when we visited to take photos. George Swann (Kimberley Birdwatching) also made the trip to photograph the bird. It was quite approachable as it drank from a dripping tap,

scavenged insects from the ground and at times even hopped onto car bonnets.

Mike Carter who has written about the White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, was ready to fly 4000 km from Melbourne to see the bird. However, she had disappeared by 6 January. Normally an Asian coastal species, we think this is a new species for Western Australia and the third recorded for Australia. Identifying the species was quite tricky; most *Motacilla* sp. seen in Australia have been the White Wagtail and until recently *lugens* was still thought to be a race. There was one White Wagtail recorded in Broome, 1977 and an unconfirmed sighting at Willies Creek in 1993.

Just when we thought we couldn't possibly add any more species to our birdlist, along came Cyclone Gertie in late December to blow in a few more vagrants. Bruce Davis found a Blue-winged Pitta beachwashed at Coconut Wells just north of Broome while two species of Shearwater were observed or found on the beach, Hutton's and Wedge-tailed. Another Rose-crowned Fruit-Dove made its way into a mist net at Cable Beach, making it the third recorded for Broome.

Last year BBO formed one team for the National RAOU Twitchathon, this year three teams were formed, reflecting the growing interest in the birdlife of Broome among the locals. Two teams raced on the National Day, the *BBO Barwits* and *BBO Broadbeaks* and the *Sticky Beaks* participated in the WA race in December. Having endured 24 hours of twitching last year, we must say we really enjoyed the comparatively civil 12-hour 'Champagne' race. Morning and afternoon tea stops are enforced and no active birdwatching must take place during these times. However, we counted the Lesser Frigatebirds from Helen's residence at Coconut Well, while sipping tea and nibbling at cakes. At Crystal Ponds (Broome Sewage Farm) we again were forced to sit down and relax and were lucky enough to see a Yellow Wagtail through the telescope.

In WABN Observations this issue, fourteen Little Tern nests at Coconut Well were reported. We think this is the first report of breeding around Broome and the nests were closely watched by local resident, Helen Macarthur. Eggs hatched and three chicks were banded. When next observed all trace of nests and eggs were gone, having been vandalised by people, footprints everywhere. This seabird species is considered threatened and there are thought to be only 500 breeding pairs in Australia. In many parts of Eastern Victoria, Little Tern colonies are fenced off and guarded by Wardens.

The installation of a 24-hour solar/diesel power system in February will greatly benefit visitors to the Observatory, especially the AWSG Expedition in March and April, which is set to be the biggest ever with 70 participants. We are busy now installing new equipment to be compatible with the solar power system. The waders are getting ready too, but for a different reason, they are fattening up in preparation for northward departure in March and April.

In June, Perry de Rebeira, well-known WA ornithologist, will lead a *Banding Fieldcraft* course at BBO. Participants will learn about why people band birds and how to do it effectively and safely. If you want to see some of our dry tropical species at close hand and visit some top birding habitat in Broome, book now. Ring (091) 935 600 for an up-to-date course brochure.

Jon Fallaw and Becky Hayward

References:

Carter, M., Farnes, R., & Pamment, N. (1995), White Wagtails in Victoria, *Australian Bird Watcher* 16, 21-33.

LAKE MONGER, 2 November 1995

The 2nd November was a fine, warm day for the mid-week walk round Lake Monger. We were pleased to see 12 members, including Ken from Malaysia who was in Perth at the time. It was a great asset to have Norm with his telescope to identify birds far out on the lake, and to diagnose a "blue bird" in the reeds which turned out to be a blue ball!

The Great Crested Grebe* provided the best entertainment. There was a nest about two metres from the bank on the south-west corner with one bird sitting and the other keeping close watch. There were about eight or nine pairs altogether, some of them performing their elaborate courtship ritual including the "reed" act, diving and bringing up a bunch of reeds then presenting it to the partner.

Thirty-four native species were recorded as well as a group of geese with several yellow downy goslings, some Muscovy Ducks and a number of Mallards, some obviously crossed with Pacific Black Duck. We recorded nine breeding species of native birds. The Dusky Moorhens appeared to have had an especially good season and of course there were plenty of Black Swans, some just laying, some with quite large cygnets.

The water was at a very high level so there was no exposed sand bank for waders or for the loafing ducks which are usually seen on the island later in the summer. Lake Monger provides a very rewarding walk, not only for water birds but also for a variety of bush birds.

Norah Brockman

* See also lead article by Mavis Norgard in this edition. Eds.

AUSTIN BAY, 5 November

The day was already warming considerably as people gathered near the Austin Bay Nature Reserve for this full day excursion. The 20-strong group set off on the sandy tracks through banksia/eucalypt woodland, enjoying good views of Red-capped Parrots and a fleeting glimpse for some of Regent Parrots. Australian Ringnecks were the most common parrots. Splendid Fairy-wrens and White-browed Scrubwrens called from dense undergrowth and eventually revealed themselves. The windy conditions were blamed for merely hearing, but not seeing Shining Bronze-Cuckoo and Grey Shrike-thrush. Even the common honeyeaters were not openly visible, although we did manage a breeding record for Western Gerygone, some satisfying views of a male Rufous Whistler and a Grey Fantail who behaved very boldly.

Our first view of Austin Bay was not promising, seeming to be occupied only by Pelicans and Australian Shelducks, but a Black-winged Stilt, two Great Knots and a couple of small flocks of Red-necked Stints were eventually observed. The "star waders", however, were definitely the 104 Bar-tailed Godwits.

Returning to our starting point around mid-day, we were grateful to the local farmer who allowed us to eat our lunches in the shade of a huge, old fig tree on his property. After this, we enjoyed a walk to the nearby freshwater wetland to admire the Yellow-billed Spoonbills lazily probing for food, the Great

Egret patiently waiting and the Little Egret seeking a feed rather more actively. Black Swans with cygnets, Black Duck, Grey Teal and one Australasian Shoveller were also seen – as well as the inevitable numerous Shelducks. A Sacred Kingfisher succeeded in capturing several juicy morsels which it took back to its perch to flay and consume. A Swamp Harrier was seen several times.

We ambled back to 'our' fig tree to check off bird lists – 61 species so far for the day.

A suggestion by Geoff Burrow that we might look at the Ravenswood Caravan Park swamp (beside the Murray River off Old Pinjarra Road) was met with enthusiasm. Soon we were all appreciating the grand old Tuarts growing on the hill overlooking this wetland which was new to most of us. In a remarkably short time, we had ticked 37 species for this site on our cards, nine of these being breeding records. These were Australasian Grebe, Great Egret, Little Egret, Nankeen Night Heron, Australian White Ibis, Yellow-billed Spoonbill, Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal and Whistling Kite. The group agreed that this peaceful and productive swamp should certainly be included in the 'Austin Bay' excursion in future.

Judy Blyth

WANNAMAL LAKE AND OTHER AREAS, 18 November 1995

On a sunny, spring morning 10 people met at Bullsbrook to be led by Clive Napier. The group drove to Udmung Nature Reserve where it was met by Bruce and Ann Buchanan. A variety of birds were seen such as Scarlet Robin, Striated Pardalote, Splendid Fairy-wren, Rufous Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, White-naped Honeyeater and Short-billed Black-Cockatoo.

Later the group walked on the shores of the Wannamal and Beermullah Lakes searching for waders. Due to winter rain, water in the lakes was unusually high and the only wader seen was one Common Sandpiper. Other more common water birds such as Blue-billed Ducks, Musk Ducks, Pelicans and Hoary-headed and Great Crested Grebes, to name a few, were also seen. Altogether 58 species were recorded. The highlight of the trip was the sighting of a White-winged Triller and a Banded Lapwing.

Many thanks to the Buchanans for providing support, letting us use their verandah for lunch and showing us their delightful, well-established native garden and to Clive Napier for expertly leading this full-day excursion.

Tanya Spence

BUNGENDORE PARK, 14 December

On a grey morning, seven people met at the Park entrance on Admiral Road, Bedfordale. Bungendore, according to the sign at the gate, means "Place of Gum Blossom". There was, in fact, a fair amount of gum blossom in evidence, together with a surprising number of plants flowering in the understorey.

As mentioned in the last issue of Bird Notes, there was a fire through here in January 1995 and, now, in December 1995, many of the burnt trees are making very thick regrowth. So much, in fact, that we had to look quite hard to pick up a Golden Whistler that was singing close to us. The dryandra thickets had been destroyed but it was encouraging to see

seedlings appearing among the detritus.

For a sunless day the bushbirds were active and numerous. Good sightings were made of Western Yellow Robin, Rufous Treecreeper, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo and Shining Bronze-Cuckoo. Among the Thornbills, the Western appeared to be, for once, the most prevalent.

Evidence of breeding was observed only of Common Bronzewing, some young of which sat tight on the ground, flushing only when very closely approached (say one to two metres).

At the end of the morning our final count was 35 species.

Thanks to our leader, Les Harris, for showing us this pleasant and interesting area.

Eric Banfield

PIESSE BROOK, KALAMUNDA NATIONAL PARK, 7 January 1996

The early morning air held the threat of a hot summer's day and the grasses on the verge looked brown and brittle. The flock of black-cockatoos feeding on low shrubs by the roadside seemed conscious of the need to conserve energy – they were unusually subdued and so quiet and unobtrusive in their movements that they were hard to pick out even though there were some 15-20 large birds almost under our noses. This all seemed promising to me. We were to walk alongside a brook which had permanent water in an otherwise parched environment, through a rich habitat varying from the thick scrub on the steep slope of the valley sides to the well wooded edges of the brook's course. Surely, a wide selection of bird life would be seeking this welcoming cool sanctuary. Yet, we saw only a small number of birds in total. Apart from the cockatoos we only saw one parrot in each of the four species sighted and that includes the Ringneck. The only birds we saw and heard in relative abundance were the Striated Pardalote and the Splendid Fairy-wren. The fairy-wren males were all in bright shining full colour looking as though freshly enamelled. Unfortunately, the Red-browed Finch was not sighted this time.

GIFTS

Think of purchasing your gifts from the
Perry House office

Books, field guides, calendars, cards,
tapes, videos, CDs and more

Call at the office any weekday morning, see our
range of stock or check catalogues for items
that can be ordered

Ask us to post out a list of items available

The stock is constantly being updated

But it seemed strange to me that in three and a half hot hours, some 14 pairs of eyes could only discover 25 species of birds in such a promising area. Our data base summary shows a total of 72 species seen in six recorded visits, but a high proportion of these have been seen once only. This contrasts strangely with, say, Wungong Gorge or Ellis Brook which consistently show recurring counts of the same resident species.

Has anyone a theory that might explain the paucity of recurring sightings in this quite delightful area?

Peter Anson

COODANUP 13 January

The excursion to Coodanup coincided with the monthly meeting there of the Mandurah Birders. A total of 25 watchers attended. Having survived the shock of a strong southerly wind, and the large flocks of crabbers, we were able to find a limited number of waders, especially on the lee shore of Creery Island Reserve, and on the mud flats at the mouth of the Serpentine River. Red-necked Stints and Red-capped Plovers, usually present in large numbers, were conspicuously absent; Bar-tailed Godwits, however, were observed in large numbers, in excess of 250.

We then moved to the more sheltered locality at the western end of the Estuary Bridge and walked through the Tuart/Marri woodland, past the recently created lakes, attractive habitats for the Australasian Grebe, and back to the Estuary shore. Our bird list comprised 55 species, of which eight were waders, including Eastern Curlew, Whimbrel and Great Knot.

Frank Pridham

DWELLINGUP CAMPOUT, 26/28 January

The Australia Day weekend turned on perfect weather for a small (8) group of campers who assembled at Jan and Rob Hill's delightful property at Dwellingup.

Apart from the 5.30 am rises for early morning birdwalks, it was a most laid-back and enjoyable weekend. Official birdwalks were enjoyed in the early morning and evening, with the middle of the day given over to swimming, eating, drinking and resting under the gum trees.

Highlights included evening spotlighting tours featuring Owlet-Nightjars and Tawny Frogmouths and – for the VERY select group which rolled out early the first morning – excellent sightings of Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Red-eared Firetails and both Red-winged and Splendid Fairy-wrens. Most of us would not have believed that, by the end of the weekend, we wouldn't even bother to lift our binoculars to look at just another Splendid Fairy-wren!

Prize for the best sighting went to Heather and Tony for an active nest of Silvereyes, and I won the prize for guessing the species count for the weekend (actual count was 53 species). I'm sure there is no truth in the rumour that two senior ladies were seen skulking up and down all the back alleys in Dwellingup looking for extra species.

Many thanks to Jan and Rob and Katie for their warm hospitality and endless cups of coffee and scones.

Bob Clark

Coming Events

Saturday 2 March to Monday 4 March– Long weekend Campout at Claire House, Broke Inlet, near Walpole

Claire House is a private waterfront residence overlooking Broke Inlet. We have been invited by the owners to compile a bird list for the area, using Claire House as our base. Close by is the D'Entrecasteaux National Park.

A 240v diesel generator provides power. There is gas cooking and refrigeration, and a solar water heater.

All crockery, cutlery and cooking utensils are provided, but you will need to bring your own food, linen and pillows. Blankets are supplied.

There are two double bedrooms, one twin room, and one large room with a set of bunks and two single beds.

We have room for 10 in the house; others can come self-sufficient for camping. Bookings can be made on a first-come, first-served basis by ringing Dave Crossley on 09 434 2000.

Claire House is located between Manjimup and Walpole, approximately 400 km from Perth. Travel south on the South Western Highway. Ninety-three km south of Manjimup, turn right from the Highway into Broke Inlet Road. The junction is clearly signposted. RAOU signs will also be present. The gateway to Claire House is on the left-hand side of Broke Inlet Road, about 10 km from the Highway.

Leader: Dave Crossley

Saturday 9 March – Half-day Excursion, Thomson's Lake

Meet at 8.30 am in the car park off Russell Road, between Pearse and Hammond Roads. A good area for bushbirds, waders and waterbirds.

Leader: Bill McRoberts

Thursday 14 March – Mid-week Excursion, Lake Monger

Meet at 8.30 am at the most-westerly car park off Lake Monger Drive, just before reaching Gregory Street. This will be a good opportunity to view many species of duck and other waterbirds.

Leader: Mike Keanan

Sunday 17 March – Half-day Excursion, Lake Gwelup

Meet at 8.30 am at the car park at the corner of Stoneham Street and Huntriss Road (north of Karrinyup Road). An opportunity to see both waterbirds and bushbirds.

Leader: Clive Nealon

Saturday 23 March – Full-day Excursion, Whiteman Park

Meet at 8.00 am at the gate 5 km north of the Marshall-Beechboro Road intersection (NOT at the main gate). Look for the RAOU signs. The gate will be locked at 8.30 am – be punctual. Michael Brooker of the CSIRO will take us into an area of the park (closed to the public) which he was studying.

Leader: Michael Brooker

Monday 25 March Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Dr Graeme Smith of the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology at Helena Valley conducted research on the Noisy Scrub-bird in the 1970s and was involved in censuses of that species and of the Western Bristlebird until 1988. In addition,

recent work in Two Peoples Bay has given him a valuable historical perspective on the birdlife of this most important nature reserve. His talk will concentrate on the general ecology of the three rare bird species to be found in that reserve, namely, the Noisy-Scrub-bird, the Western Bristlebird and the Western Whipbird.

Wednesday 27 March – Mid-week Excursion, North Lake

Meet at 8.30 am in the car park on the corner of Farrington Road and Progress Drive. North Lake is part of the Beeliar Regional Park, and is a good area for bush and waterbirds.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Sunday 31 March – Full-day Excursion, Garden Island

Meet at 8.30 am in the car park at the mainland end of the bridge. We will pool cars. Take a picnic lunch, as there is no kiosk on the island. We will depart from the island by 3 pm. A maximum of 25 people is allowed. Those who wish to go should phone Clive Napier on (09) 332 7265 before 27 March.

Leader: Boyd Wykes

Thursday 4 April – Mid-week Excursion, Lake Gwelup

Meet at 8.30 am at the car park at the corner of Stoneham Street and Huntriss Road (north of Karrinyup Road). An opportunity to see both waterbirds and bushbirds.

Leader: Eric Banfield

Friday 5 April to Monday 8 April – Easter Campout, Lake Gulson Timber Reserve (Lake King to Holt Rock Area)

Meet from the afternoon of Thursday 4 April onwards at campsite, in the south-western corner of a large gravel pit 1 km west of Holt Rock Road South (see the map that follows). The gravel access track is 2.9 km south of Winchcombe Road (it is the first track west off Holt Rock Road) and runs along a fenceline dividing bushland from cleared paddock. Look for RAOU signs.

Half-day outings on Friday 5 April will leave camp at 8 am and 1.30 pm.

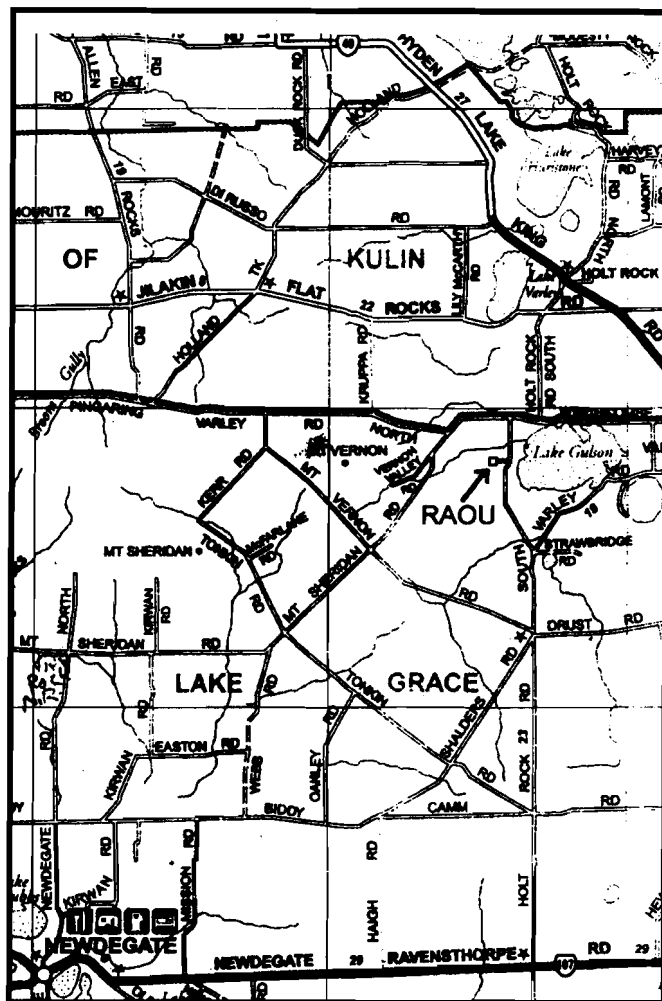
Bush showers and toilets will be available on site. Although there will be one small 240 volt generator for lights (and keeping the drinks cold!) power will not be generally available.

Some of us will stay most of the week 8th to 12th April and continue surveying surrounding bushland areas for birds.

There is a very significant chain of nature reserves, based on a system of salt lakes, from Holt Rock to Lake King. None of these has been surveyed in detail for birds. The area is also the centre of a most unexpected cluster of six Night Parrot reports, from the 1930s to the present. Our trip can act as a first assessment of the likelihood of finding Night Parrots there.

Important: Intending participants please contact John or Judy Blyth with the details of your trip (length of stay, tent or caravan, number of people, possession of spotlight etc.) by **Friday, March 29th**, as there may be additional details you need to know. Maximum of 30 people.

Leaders: John Blyth, Mal Graham (Katanning)



Map showing the site for the Easter Camp (from Map 60 in the *WA Travellers Atlas* 1994)

Sunday 14 April – Half-day Excursion, Wungong Gorge/ Bungendore Park

Meet at 8.30 am at the first car park for Wungong Dam, at the end of Admiral Road (off Albany Highway), Bedfordale. An excellent site for Red-eared Firetails and White-breasted Robins. Ninety-one different species have been seen at this site. After lunch (BYO) we'll go to Bungendore for an hour or so.

Leader: Bill McRoberts

Wednesday 17 April – Mid-week Excursion, Stoney Brook

Meet at 8.30 am on Mills road at Cohunu Wildlife Park car park. Mavis Norgard will lead us from here to Stoney Brook.

Leader: Mavis Norgard

Saturday 20 April – Half-day Excursion, Bell's Rapids Reserve

Meet at 8.30 am at the Bell's Rapids Reserve car park. From Midland Town Hall, travel 11 km north on the Great Northern Highway. Turn right into Cathedral Avenue, continue over the railway line, past the Brigadoon Fire Station on the right and the State Equestrian Centre on the left. At the Y junction, bear left onto gravel and continue along the

edge of the river to the car park (5.2 km from the Great Northern Highway).

Leader: Les Harris

Monday 22 April Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

As was announced on page 19 of the last issue of *WA Bird Notes*, tens of thousands of Banded Stilts nested at Lake Ballard near Menzies following cyclonic rain early in 1995. Jim Lane of CALM (who recently spoke to us about Black Swans at the Vasse Estuary, Busselton) will describe this memorable breeding event and what it has added to our knowledge of this unusual wader species.

Thursday 25 April to Sunday 28 April – Campout at White Wells Station

The station has a varied habitat and covers an area of approximately 190 000 hectares. Over 90 bird species have been recorded in earlier visits, including Bourke's Parrot, Crimson Chats, Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Black-eared Cuckoos. On one of the days, we will travel to the Warne River area, to look for Gilbert's Whistlers. Be self-sufficient for camping or caravanning. White Wells has hot showers and a barbecue area. Cost will be approximately \$5 per night, more for a powered site. If you need power, advise Clive Napier on (09) 332 7265, so he can book your site.

Travel on the Great Northern Highway to Wubin. The turnoff to White Wells Station is about 80 km north of Wubin. Do not take the first turnoff. The station is signposted with an old refrigerator. RAOU signs will also be posted. The one-way trip from Perth is approximately 350 km.

Leader: Clive Napier

Sunday 5 May – Full-day Excursion, Avon Valley National Park

Meet at 9.00 am at the Park entrance. From Perth, travel via the Toodyay Road, through Gidgegannup and Noble Falls. Turn left into Morangup Road and proceed for about 5 km, then turn left into the car park at the Park entrance. RAOU signs will direct you. (The round trip from Perth is approximately 120 km.)

The Avon Valley slopes steeply down the Darling Scarp into the Avon River. The valleys are forested with wandoo and the birding should be excellent.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

Wednesday 8 May – Mid-week Excursion, Woodman Point Reserve, Cockburn

Meet at 8.30 am at the entrance to Woodman Point Recreation Camp, off Cockburn Road, south of the caravan park. We will start by looking for bushbirds in the reserve of tuart woodland and native cypress, and then head over to the point to look for seabirds (don't forget your telescopes for this part).

Leader: Brenda Newbey

Sunday 12 May – Half-day Excursion, Bold Park/Perry Lakes

Meet at 7.30 am at Perry House, 71 Oceanic Drive, Floreat. Birdwatching in Bold Park and Perry Lakes for 3-4 hours.

Leader: Helen Clark

Saturday 18 May – Half-day Excursion – Stinton Cascades Nature Reserve, Karragullen

Meet at 8.30 am in Gardiner Road, about 200 metres past the intersection with Brookton Highway (13 km from Albany Highway). This is a CALM reserve of jarrah and a good area for birds. Bring lunch.

Leader: John Start

Sunday 26 May – Full-day Excursion, Yalgorup National Park

Meet at 9.00 am at the corner of Old Coast Road and White Hill Road, 9.7 km south of the Dawesville Cut. The round trip from Perth is 200 km. This is a flat walk of approximately 12 km to Swan Pond adjacent to Lake Clifton through tuart and peppermint woodland. We should see a good representation of the area's bushbirds.

Bring your lunch and something to drink. I'll boil the billy at morning tea and lunch.

Phone Sue on (09) 444 1607 for further details.

Leader: Sue Abbotts

Monday 27 May Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Associate Professor Ron Wooller of Murdoch University will describe the landmark study on Short-tailed Shearwaters (Muttonbirds) begun by the late Dom Serventy (one of the most important figures in WA ornithology) in 1947 and still continuing today. Although the study is conducted in Bass Strait and the shearwaters which are its subject breed only in small numbers in WA in the Archipelago of the Recherche, the findings about this bird's natural history have implications for other shearwaters and seabirds generally.

Wednesday 29 May – Mid-week Excursion, Bungendore Park, Bedfordale

Meet at 8.30 am at the Park entrance on Admiral Road, just past the entrance to the Emmaus Christian School, on the right-hand side going towards the dam. We will walk in an area of the park which escaped the disastrous fire in January 1995. Birds not common on the coastal plain can be seen here, such as Rufous Treecreepers and Western Yellow Robins.

Leader: Les Harris

Saturday 1 June to Monday 3 June – Campout at Dongara

It is important that intending participants contact the RAOU office by Friday 17 May to find out which camping/caravan park will be used, and to enable organisers to make a block booking.

Leader: To be announced.

Saturday 8 June – Half-day Excursion around Herdsman Lake

Meet at 8 am at car park at Tennis Court off Herdsman Parade, near the corner of John Sanders Drive (E6 on Map 59, Streetsmart 1995 Perth Street Directory).

This is a long half-day walk and lunch, back at the cars, will be late, so bring nibblies and water to tide yourself over. You should be rewarded by a good mix of waterbirds and bushbirds.

Leaders: John and Judy Blyth

Monday 24 June Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Dr Nic Dunlop, a consulting ecologist known for his work on seabirds, will talk to us about the natural history of the Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus* in Western Australia.

Monday 22 July Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Andy Chapman of CALM in Kalgoorlie works in an area with major salt lake systems and a high diversity of eucalypts and will be telling us about the changes which have taken place in the birdlife of that area since European settlement.

Monday 26 August Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Russell Barrett, a keen naturalist with a particular interest in birds and plants, lives on Beverley Springs Station in the Kimberley and will describe his experience of the birdlife of a region in which few people have had the opportunity to observe birds at all times of the year.

Monday 23 September Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Costa Rica is a small country lying just north of Panama on the isthmus linking North and South America, and has a much better than average record for conserving its varied flora and fauna. Clive Napier will describe his and Wendy's encounter with the extremely rich birdlife of this little country.

Tuesday 1 October Special Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

The name of Dr Clive Minton is associated in Western Australia with the NW Australia wader expeditions which he has led for the last decade and which have been based in Broome. His talk, the final details of which remain to be settled, will concern an area considered to be one of the most important for waders in the world.

Monday 14 October Special Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Speaker to be arranged.

Monday 25 November Meeting – Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre 8.00 pm

Speaker to be arranged.

NO DECEMBER EVENING MEETING.

IMPORTANT

**Did you read the notice
regarding the Suburban Bird
Survey on page 17?**

York Earthcare Festival



**SUNDAY
MARCH 10TH - 1996**

**A Day of Fun, Education &
Entertainment for the whole family.**

Courtesy Buses (including disabled access)

FREE ADMISSION TO ALL VENUES.

IF YOU CARE - BE THERE!

Note that the RAOU will have a stand at this event, to provide information about the work of RAOU, plus display a range of publications produced and stocked.

For more information, contact:

York Tourist Bureau	(096) 411 301
York Earthcare Committee	(096) 411 541

COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS-NORTH KEELING-CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Kevin Coate will be leading a tour to Christmas Island and to North Keeling Island between 10-17 April 1996, 20-27 November 1996 and in January 1997.

North Keeling is seldom visited. The German cruiser SMS *Emden* was beached here after a battle with HMAS *Sydney* in 1914. The island has retained its rainforest, which includes a closed canopy of giant *Pisonia* trees. Naturalists will delight in seeing the different fungi, crabs and the biggest variety of breeding sea birds of any island in the Indian Ocean, including the delicate White Tern and a huge colony of Red-footed Booby.

At Cocos Island visits will be made to Home Island, Horsburgh Island and Direction Island. On Direction Island there will be an opportunity to snorkel over coral reefs and see the rich variety of tropical fish.

At Christmas Island there is a different type of rainforest and many endemic plant species, which are now protected by the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. The Christmas Island land crabs are world renowned for their variety and numbers, especially the red crabs and giant robber crabs. For birdwatchers, Christmas Island is a fantastic place, with opportunities to see Abbotts Booby, Christmas Island Frigate Bird, Christmas Island Hawk Owl, and the incredibly beautiful Golden Bosun Bird. There is also a chance of seeing vagrants such as the Javan Pond Heron, a new bird for Australia and its territories, and one of 35 species seen there on our December trip.

**For further information contact Madeleine Raffels, Coate's Wildlife Tours
PO Box 1407, Midland WA 6056 or Telephone or Fax (09) 296 1877**



"SPECIALISTS IN NATURE TOURS"

**EXPERIENCE WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S SPECTACULAR AND DIVERSE
NATURAL HISTORY WITH NATURALIST GUIDES
OF GREAT KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**

10 April, 17 July, 20 Nov, 11 Dec – 8-day Christmas and Cocos Islands, includes land crabs, endemic birds, tropical rain forest, snorkelling.

9 April – 9-day Spawning of the Coral/Whale Sharks at Coral Bay.

19 June & 12 July – 17-day Kimberley Wonders, ex Broome, includes Gibb River Road, Bungle Bungles.

14 August – 11-day Kennedy Ranges/Mt. Augustus includes wildflowers, birds.

3 Sept, 5 Nov – 4-day South-West for forests, birds and wildflowers.

For brochures and bookings, contact:
PO Box 1407, Midland, WA 6056
Tel: 018 958 261 Tel/Fax: 09 296 1877