

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of the WA Group
Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union

No 78 June 1996

Australian Pelicans Breeding on Boundary Island

Boundary Island is a nature reserve located in the northern part of the Peel Inlet. Although relatively small, it is one of the three major islands situated near the Peel outlet which flows through the Mandurah estuary into the Indian Ocean. Boundary Island can be reached by boat, is sparsely vegetated and is the most isolated of the islands.

Vegetation comprises mainly grasses and young gum trees. Some tree planting has taken place and there are several small groves of casuarina and peppermint trees. Large areas have little cover and consist of bare patches of sand and shells. Around the island's perimeter are thick bands of rushes, sedges and samphire flats. These are particularly popular with the Little Grassbird which is common.

The south eastern side of the island has a low lying samphire flat that progressively grades into a large mudflat. The mudflat remains partially exposed at high tide and provides an important roosting place for cormorants, waders, terns and pelicans.

Breeding on the island by a colony of Australian Pelicans was the main feature during the 1995/1996 season. Australian Pelicans have been breeding on islets in Peel Inlet since 1962 (Storr and Johnstone, 1988).

Two separate colonies were located on the south eastern side of the island and the following notes describe their progress.

16 December 1995

Colony 1

Elongated in shape, this colony was located on the south eastern side of Boundary Island. At its maximum the colony was 36 metres in length and 9 metres in width. It was about 19 metres from the water's edge and the main breeding area was located around a slight mound at the northern end. As the colony expanded, new breeding sites were progressively placed in lower lying areas. Water marks around the colony indicate that at high tide it was situated on a small, separate island and at low tide on a peninsula of the main island.

The colony was on a low mound near the water's edge and consisted of six nests with two eggs and seven nests with one egg. Nearby were some broken and crushed eggs.

Colony 2

The second colony was also on the south eastern side of Boundary Island but lacked the open exposure of the first and was located more inland. This colony was about 50 metres from the water's edge and situated between a band of rushes and the base of a low dune. At its maximum the colony was 43 metres in length. The shortest distance between the two colonies was 54 metres.

In contrast to the first colony this one was situated in a sheltered location. The nesting area was on a thick bed of straw-like material at the base of a dune and contained four nests with one egg each.

ATTENTION!

CHANGE OF VENUE FOR MEETINGS

Beginning on Monday, 24th of June, the WA Group's regular venue for General Meetings will be the Joan Watters Community Centre, Jersey Street, Wembley. This is within a kilometre of our previous venue at Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre – see map in Coming Events section (page 25).

5 January 1996

Colony 1

The colony near the water's edge had grown to 92 nests and, based on the fresh nest scrapes on the fringes, seemed to be still expanding. Clutch sizes ranged from 1 to 3. The first juvenile (less than one week old) graced the colony.

According to HANZAB (Volume 1 part B, page 745), the average incubation period is 32-35 days and juveniles are covered in short grey down within a week. Based on this information and the hatching of the first juvenile the colony must have commenced around the last week of November 1995.

The breeding site was densely packed and there were in excess of 270 Pelicans present.

Colony 2

Breeding appeared to have stopped at the inland colony. No trace of any nests or eggs could be found, though a large group of pelicans still remained on site.

22 January 1996

Colony 1

The colony was in a vigorous state. The breeding population near the water's edge had further expanded and contained 130 to 140 breeding pairs. Two large juveniles covered in white down were present. Three recently hatched young were seen.

Colony 2

Surprisingly, the inland colony previously thought deserted had re-established itself and now contained 62 nests.

At the end of January the total breeding population of Australian Pelicans on Boundary Island was close to 200 pairs.

19 February 1996

Colony 1

From a distance the colony seemed deserted and few adults were seen. My first thoughts were that the adults were out fishing. Getting closer, it became obvious that something had happened to this colony. Only six active nests remained on and near the mound: two nests with two eggs and four with one egg.

Nearby was one large dead juvenile. What had happened to all the breeding pairs that were here last time? There were clear signs that the site had been subject to a high tide but could this have caused the disappearance of so many nests?

Despite what may have occurred a small crèche had formed and contained 14 juveniles in different stages of growth. They were accompanied by a couple of adult birds.

Colony 2

This colony had doubled in size since the last visit. There were now 134 nests. Perhaps the pelicans who were unsuccessful at the water's edge moved to this colony for a second breeding attempt.

A pair of Australian Ravens and a group of Silver Gulls were scavenging around the fringe waiting for an opportunity. One Pelican was seen carrying a large bone in its beak.

At the southern end of the colony synchronized hatching was in full swing. The young had only hatched in the past few days as they were still small and naked.

10 March 1996

Colony 1

The colony was deserted. The site was littered with

feathers and two large dead juveniles. Near the water's edge 16 juveniles showing brown patches of feathers, took to the water.

Further out on the Peel Inlet large rafts (>100) of Australian Pelicans were seen feeding.

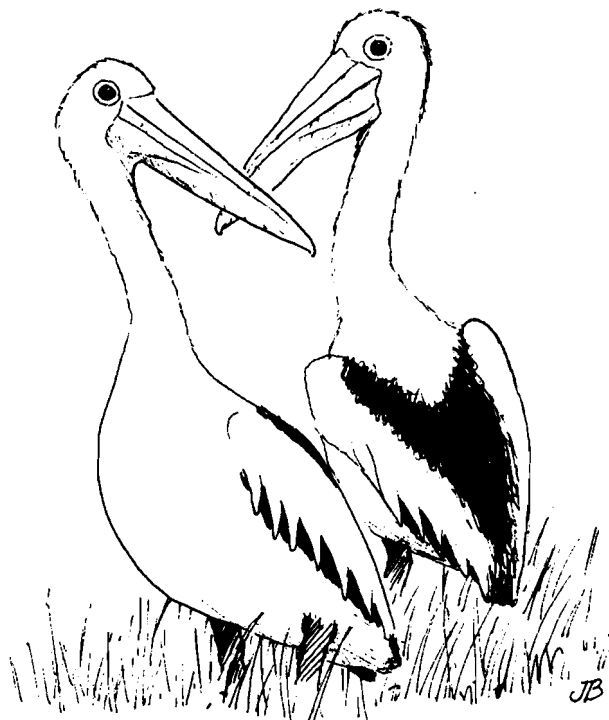
The overall reproduction rate of this colony had apparently been low.

Colony 2

A Swamp Harrier was seen nearby and the smell of guano pervaded the air.

It was interesting to observe the different stages of the Pelican's breeding cycle through the length of the colony. At the northern end Pelicans were preparing nesting sites or sitting on eggs. Towards the middle of the colony all the nests had recently hatched young and then on the far side the large juveniles were already forming small crèches.

One pelican had built its nest on top of a sedge bush, a foot off the ground. Some Pelican walkways to the water were visible.



Australian Pelicans - Boundary Island
by Judy Blyth

11 April 1996

Colony 1

The tide was at its highest point and a moderate south westerly wind was blowing.

Water surrounded the nesting site and most of the old nesting scrapes were flooded. Only the small mound where the colony first started remained dry.

Colony 2

A large crèche of nearly fully grown juveniles was present, containing an estimated 120-130 young pelicans. A few made their way to the water. The number of adult birds still with nests amounted to 139, some birds sitting on eggs (48 nests) and others with recently hatched young.

One sitting adult was seen jabbing at a dead Silver Gull. Another adult was enlarging or starting a nest scrape. Beaks full of dirt and straw were tossed out in front of the bird in

total disregard of its neighbours.

Spread throughout were some small groups of large woolly white young (26 counted).

Assuming each adult raised two young, which is on the optimistic side, the colony would have held around 214 nesting pairs with a good accrual rate.

Summary

On Boundary Island the breeding season was quite extended. It commenced in late November and, based on the present information, the colony should still be active well into May if not later.

A conservative estimate of the combined number of breeding Pelicans on Boundary Island during 1995-1996 would be 230 pairs.

These results contrast with previous records of the breeding season for Australian Pelicans in south western Australia. Serventy and Whittell (1976) referred to nesting at Mandurah in spring, and Storr and Johnstone (1988) state that breeding occurs from late August to February, with unsuccessful breeding attempts from late June to early August.

Boundary Island is usually quite peaceful, but during the summer holidays the island is regularly visited by houseboats, pleasure craft and crabbers.

Residential development is encroaching all around Peel Inlet. Boundary Island is no different with a new subdivision, Mandurah Quay, marina included, being developed directly opposite the island.

M. Singor

References:

Marchant, S. and Higgins, P.J. 1990. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds*. (Oxford University Press, Melbourne).

Serventy, D.L. and Whittell, H.M. 1976. *Birds of Western Australia*. Fifth edition. (University of Western Australia Press, Perth) (page 107).

Storr, G. M. and Johnstone, R. E. 1988. Birds of the Swan Coastal Plain and adjacent seas and islands. *Records of the Western Australian Museum* Supplement No. 28. (page 17).

Editors' Note: The Boundary Island colony is now the only pelican breeding colony in the Peel-Harvey system and protection of the colony is therefore important. Breeding pelicans are particularly sensitive to disturbance when they have chicks up to three weeks old. Disturbance at this time may result in desertion of the colony with consequent mortality of the chicks. Observers should be particularly careful not to disturb breeding birds. We should also encourage other people to respect the needs of the pelicans at this time.

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.

This report sees more exciting records, including at least one new bird for the State. Six Black-naped Terns were seen

near Broome during the AWSG banding expedition there recently (see details elsewhere in this issue). A swiftlet (apparently a Glossy Swiftlet) was also seen at Broome during the AWSG expedition, and details are being forwarded to the RAOU Records Appraisal Committee (RAC). If this report proves correct, it will be another new species for the WA list. Other highlights include some very high counts (e.g. for Little Terns at Broome).

Observers are reminded that, for rarely seen or difficult to identify species, adequate documentation is required for inclusion in WABN. For example, new records, or records of species rarely recorded in the south-west should be accompanied by a description of what was observed and reasons for the identification. This also assists the editors to provide extra information to readers.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Malleefowl - 1, 8/95, Reserve 14406, 30 km N of Koorda (Koorda) - KK * active mound, 19-21/8/95, Reserve 17925, 40 km N of Mukinbudin (Mukinbudin) - KK * 1, 5/2/96, Patonga Rd, Dryandra State Forest (Williams) - FO

Freckled Duck - 1, 19/3/96, found dead on Ascot Race Course (Belmont) - BBa

Kerguelen Petrel - small numbers on numerous occasions between 1/11/95 and 31/1/96; higher counts of 200+ over 8 hrs on 25/11/95, 100+ over 7 hrs on 15/12/95, 200+ over 6 hrs on 20/12/95, 300+ over 6 hrs on 29/1/96, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual at this time of year)

Great-winged Petrel - 2, 18/11, 4, 20/11 and 2, 25/11/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual on west coast)

White-headed Petrel - small numbers on numerous occasions between 1/11/95 and 31/1/96; higher counts of 20+ over 4 hrs on 11/11/95, 20+ over 6 hrs on 20/12/95, 20+ over 6 hrs on 3/1/96, 20+ over 6 hrs on 24/1/96, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual in these numbers at this time of year)

Blue Petrel - 1, 7/11, 8/11, 26/11 and 27/11/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual in the SW)

Broad-billed/Salvin's/Antarctic/Slender-billed/Fairy/Fulmar Prions - small numbers, 18/11/95 to 18/12/95, highest number 20+ over 6 hrs on 19/11/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (unusual at this time of year)

Grey Petrel - 43 observed over 16 occasions between 1/11/95 and 29/1/96; highest counts 5 in 8 hrs on 7/11/95 and 6 in 6 hrs on 8/12/95, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (not often reported, especially at this time of year)

Flesh-footed Shearwater - 500+, 10/2/96, The Gap, Torndirrup National Park (Albany) - FO

Short-tailed Shearwater - 8, 15/12/95 and 6, 14/1/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Australasian Gannet - 1, 10/2/96, The Gap, Torndirrup National Park (Albany) - FO * 1, 11/2/96, near Sugarloaf Rock, Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park (Busselton) - FO (unusual at this time of year) * 2, 24/3/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - JD * 1, 14/4/96, Dawesville Cut (Mandurah) - JD * 1 adult and 1 immature, 21/4/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - JD

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 11/2/96 - 16/3/96, Big Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CN, HvW, BH

Painted Button-quail - 4, 9/2/96, corner Wharton Rd and Forrest Rd, Forrestdale (Armadale) - MBa

Wood Sandpiper - ca. 50, 13/2/96, Thompson's Lake (Cockburn) - FO (high count for this species in the south-west)

Great Knot - 45, 8/5/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - BN (presumably overwintering)

Sanderling - 1 of 6 in near full breeding plumage, 5/5/96, Dawesville Cut (Mandurah) - JD

Red-necked Stint - 4897, 25/2/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC

Broad-billed Sandpiper - 2, 4/2/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - CD, JD and RAOU excursion

Red-necked Phalarope - 3, 1/2/96, Government House Lake, Rottneest Island - FO * 1, 3/2/96, Government House Lake, Rottneest Island - DN

Black-winged Stilt - 20, 10/2/96, flying off the coast at The Gap (Albany) - FO * 1580, 19/3/96, Lake McLarty (Murray) - MC

Red-necked Avocet - ca. 5000, 13/2/96, Thompson's Lake (Cockburn) - FO (equal to the highest number recorded in the south-west)

Lesser Sand Plover - 1, 1/2/96, Herschell Lake, Rottneest Island - FO * 1, 13/2/96, Thompson's Lake (Cockburn) - FO (unusual in the south-west)

Inland Dotterel - 30, 22/1/96, Burma Road Nature Reserve (Greenough) - CB

Hooded Plover - 2, 14/1/96 and 1, 30/1/96, Gull Rock, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP

Pomarine Jaeger - recorded on 18 occasions between 3/11/95 and 30/1/96, all single birds per day except 2 in 8 hrs on 4/11/95, 3 over 6 hrs on 24/11/95, 2 over 7 hrs on 15/12/95, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Arctic Jaeger - recorded on 27 occasions between 1/11/95 and 16/1/96, including 14 over 8 hrs on 5/11/95, 4 over 6 hrs on 26/11/95, 4 over 6 hrs on 9/12/95, 4 over 7 hrs on 15/12/95, all at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Lesser Crested Tern - 1, seen with Crested Terns, 5/5/96, near Dawesville Cut (Mandurah) - JD (adult in not quite full breeding plumage, forehead white, orange bill, small compared with nearby Crested Terns, mantle similar colour to nearby Crested Terns (unusual); first record for the south-west; full description available)

Fairy Tern - ca. 40 pairs, 12/95, breeding (unsuccessfully) on lakes S of Rockingham (Rockingham) - PSt * ca.15 - 20 pairs, 12/95, Fremantle, in Rouse Head area, breeding unsuccessfully (Fremantle) - JD

Whiskered Tern - 40, mostly losing breeding plumage, with a few late immatures, 5/5/96, N end of Peel Inlet (Murray) - JD (unusual in these numbers at this time of year)

Purple-crowned Lorikeet - 10+, 1/2/96, near Bathurst point Lighthouse, Rottneest Island - FO * ca. 50, 3/2/96, near Fay's Bay, Rottneest Island - DN

Elegant Parrot - 200+ in roadside flock, 20/2/96, Dongolocking Nature Reserve (Dumbleyung) - CB

Fork-tailed Swift - 24, 29/2/96, Carine Swamp (Stirling) - HvW * about 36, 4/3/96, very high over Lake Joondalup (Wanneroo) - HvW * 40+, 8/3/96, Carine (Stirling) - BH * 18, 2/4/96, heard (screaming very similar to the Swift in the UK) and seen very high, all facing eastwards, but drifting steadily southwards, 0700 hrs, Carine (Stirling) - BH * 4, 3/4/96, 21 km NE of Manjimup and 1, 11/4/96, 29 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown Greenbushes) - MC * see also report on Lake King campout in this issue

Shy Heathwren - 2, 19/2/96, Dragon Rocks Nature Reserve (Kulin) - CB

Yellow-plumed Honeyeater - 1, in jarrah forest, 7/3/96, 30 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC * 1, in jarrah forest, 7/4/96, 27.5 km NE of Manjimup (Bridgetown-Greenbushes) - MC

Grey Fantail - several, white-tailed subspecies (*albicauda*), 4-8/4/96, Lake Gulson Timber Reserve, ca. 10 km W of Varley (Lake Grace) - AB, JB and RAOU excursion (south-westerly limit of distribution for this subspecies)

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

Australian Spotted Crake - 5+, 17/2/96, claypan about 30 km N of Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - FO

Gallinago sp. snipe - 1, possibly Swinhoe's Snipe, 16/3/96, De Grey River (Port Hedland) - DR, AT

Long-toed Stint - 1-3, 16/3 - 19/3/96, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - AT, DR

Pectoral Sandpiper - 3, 28/2/96, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - AT, GP * 3, 16/3 - 19/3/96, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - AT, DR

Red-necked Phalarope - 14, 28/2/96, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - AT, GP * 6, 20/3/96, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - AT, DR

Pacific Gull - 1 first year bird, 23/4/96, Point Quobba (Carnarvon) - AT, AC (current northern limit of range of this species)

White-winged Black Tern - many flocks, 4/2/96, hawking over plains and roadside vegetation in rainy conditions during cyclone Jacob, 20 km S and N of Roebourne (Roebourne) - KC

Fork-tailed Swift - 100+, 16/2/96, 50 km S of Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - FO

Thick-billed Grasswren - 5, 17 km N of Billabong Roadhouse on North West Coastal Hwy (Shark Bay) - KC

Yellow Wagtail - 1 male and 1 female *simillima*, 2 males, possibly *tschutschensis*, Port Hedland sewage works (Port Hedland) - DR, AT *et al.*

Little Grassbird - 1+, 17/2/96, claypan ca. 30 km N of Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - FO (unusual in this area)

KIMBERLEY

King Quail - 2, 25/2/96, flushed in hay paddock, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Magpie Goose - 37 nests, 5/5/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - PC, RJ *et al.*

Freckled Duck - 1, 15/3/96, Anna Plains (Broome) - PF, AT *et al.*

Black Swan - 4 adults and 2 nests, 5/5/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - PC, RJ *et al.*

Pink-eared Duck - 100, breeding, 5/5/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - PC, RJ *et al.*

Hoary-headed Grebe - 2, 12/2/96, billabong on Kingston Rest Station, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 1, 9/3/96, Broome Port (Broome) - PC

Australian Pelican - 400, 30/4/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO

Black Bittern - 5, 14/2/96, along irrigation channel, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Straw-necked Ibis - 1000, 29/3/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - CM (high count for this area)

Square-tailed Kite - 1, 16/3/96, Broome (Broome) - BBO (unusual at this time of year in this area)

Black Falcon - 1, 10/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 1, 17/3/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - PC, RJ * 1, 7/4/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - DR

Baillon's Crane - 3, 8/4/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - AT

Black-tailed Native-hen - 20+, 14/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC (uncommon in the Kimberley)

Red-chested Button-quail - 2, 21/2/96 (one picked up under spotlight, and released), Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 1, 29/3/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - FO (few records from the Kimberley)

Gallinago sp(p). snipe - 6, 10/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 1, probable Swinhoe's Snipe, 8/4/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - AT

Swinhoe's Snipe - 3, 26/3/96, Broome sewage works (Broome) - AT, PF *et al.* (seen with tail fanned at close range (2m))

Common Redshank - 13, 20/4/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO

Sanderling - 850, 22/3/96, Bush Point, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - AWSG

Broad-billed Sandpiper - 109, 18/4/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - PC

Ruff - 1, 16/3/96, 10 km N of Sandfire roadhouse (Broome) - AT

Painted Snipe - 1, 1/3/96, swamp on Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Pied Oystercatcher - 535, 20/4/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT, JF, AWSG (very high count)

Pacific Golden Plover - 5, 1/3/96, tailings dam on Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 19, 8-11/3/96, Broome town (Broome) - BBO

Pomarine Jaeger - 1, dark phase, 12/3/96, Broome (Broome) - AT, PC, RJ * 1, light phase, 22/3/96, Bush Point, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - AT, AWSG

Arctic Jaeger - 1, light phase, Broome Port (Broome) - AWSG

Lesser Crested Tern - 420, 22/3/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT *et al.* * 1750, 20/4/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT, JF, AWSG (very high count)

Roseate Tern - 2000+, 21/7/94, probably breeding, Twin Islands, ca. 21 km ENE of Cape Leveque (Broome) - GA

Black-naped Tern - 6, 20/4/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT *et al.* (first record for WA - see details elsewhere in this issue)

Common Tern - 750, 22/3/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT * 1100, 28/3/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT, AWSG

Little Tern - 14 nests, 12/95 - 1/96, Coconut Well (Broome) - HM (NB: this is the first confirmed breeding record of this species in Western Australia) * 360, 22/3/96, Bush

Point (Broome) - AT, JF *et al.* * 1200, 20/4/96, Bush Point (Broome) - AT, JF, AWSG (both these counts were at high tide roosts, suggesting a build up of birds in the area; the second count is a very high count for WA and included a number of birds in fresh breeding plumage)

White-winged Black Tern - 2000, many in partial breeding plumage, 13/4/96, Eighty Mile Beach (Broome) - AT

Spinifex Pigeon - 1, dead, 9/3/96, Cable Beach carpark, Broome (Broome) - AWSG (? transported to site on vehicle radiator?)

Oriental Cuckoo - 1, 20/3/96, Cable Beach, Broome (Broome) - BT

Common Koel - several, 13/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC (southern limit of range in E Kimberley ??) * 1, 28/3/96, Cable Beach, Broome (Broome) - PC, RJ

Channel-billed Cuckoo - several, 13/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 1, 1/3/96, Broome (Broome) - GP, AT, AWSG * 1, 28/3/96, Cable Beach (Broome) - PC, RJ

Grass Owl - 2, 11/2/96, flushed from hay paddock, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC (the wing from one injured bird is now in the WA Museum)

possible **Glossy Swiftlet** - 12/3/96, Broome Port - (PF, AWSG) (report submitted to the RAC)

Rainbow Bee-eater - 200+, 3/4/96, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG (possibly a migrating flock)

Large-billed Gerygone - several, 28/2/96, in mangroves near One Hill Island, Cambridge Gulf (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Green-backed Gerygone - 3, including one juvenile being fed, 22/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC (southern limit of range in the East Kimberley)

Shining Flycatcher - several, including a pair with a young Brush Cuckoo in their nest, 26/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike - 20+ (flock), 6/4/96, Roebuck Plains near Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - FO (possibly a migrating flock)

White-winged Triller - 25+ (flock), 5/4/96, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG

Masked Woodswallow - 100's migrating, 21/3/96, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO

Yellow Wagtail - 1, 10/2/96, Kingston Rest, about 70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Painted Finch - 15/2/96, 3 locations, Kingston Rest/Optic Hill (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC * 40, 6/4/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO

Yellow-rumped Mannikin - 1+, 10/2/96, roosting with Chestnut-breasted Mannikins and Star Finches in Typha, Nancies Crossing, Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Gouldian Finch - 8, 16/2/96, near Dunham Pilot Dam on Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC

Tree Martin - about 2000, 3/4/96, Anna Plains Station (Broome) - AWSG * 8-10 000, 7/4/96, Crab Creek (Broome) - AT, AWSG

Tawny Grassbird - 20+, 10/2/96, Kingston Rest, about

70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC
Zitting Cisticola - 10+, 10/2/96, Kingston Rest, about
70 km south of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - KC
(at the southern limit of its range in the Kimberley)

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Pond Heron sp. - 1, possibly Javan Pond Heron, but in the field or in the hand, very difficult to separate from other pond herons in immature or non-breeding plumage, 12/95 - FO *et al.* (smaller than a Nankeen Night Heron, with head, neck and front very streaked, wings an even dull rufous, belly white lower bill mostly yellow but tipped black, upper bill mostly black but with a bit of yellow, eyes yellow, thin yellow lines between the eyes and the base of the bill, legs and feet yellow, toes quite long; in flight spectacular with bright white upper inner wings, under wings and tail and a brown back.)

COCOS-KEELING ISLANDS

Junglefowl sp. - a very green bird, possibly a Green Junglefowl, 7/12/95, West Island - KC (introduced (including various domestic strains) to West Is last century, but Green Junglefowl thought to be extinct (HANZAB))

CORRECTIONS AND AMENDMENTS:

1. The **Common Wheatear** record for Christmas Island, December 1995, should have been attributed to Jim Beruldsen and Kevin Coate; Jim saw the bird first! Apologies to Jim for omitting his name in WABN 77.

2. Both records of **Fairy Prions** listed in WABN 74 (June 1995) are incorrect. The first record refers to 15 **White-headed Petrels** seen on 12/1/95 and the second record refers to 100+ **Tree Martins** seen on 8/2/95. Both were at Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Shire of Busselton).

OBSERVERS

AB = Allan Burbidge	FO = Frank O'Connor
AC = Alan Clarke	GA = George Appleby
AT = Tony Tree	GP = Grant Pearson
AWSG = Aust Wader Studies Grp	HvW = Hank van Wees
BBa = Bryan Barrett	JB = John Blyth
BBO = Broome Bird Observatory	JD = John Darnell
BH = Bob Horwood	JF = Jon Fallaw
BN = Brenda Newbey	KC = Kevin Coate
BT = Brian Thompson	KK = Kim Kershaw
CB = Craig Boase	MBa = Mike Bamford
CD = Colin Davis	MC = Michael Craig
CM = Clive Minton	PC = Peter Collins
CN = Clive Nealon	PF = Peter Fullagar
DN = David Newsome	PSt = Phil Stone
DR = Danny Rodgers	RJ = Ros Jessop
	RP = Ross Payton

BLACK-NAPED TERN NEAR BROOME

During a Sanderling banding expedition to Bush Point, Roebuck Bay, near Broome on 20 April 1996 four members of the team saw four and then two Black-naped Terns fly past from a dissipating high tide roost of some 1200 Little Terns. Our attention on the first occasion was drawn by the strange

call-note which none of us felt we could adequately put into words but which could very roughly be described as a harsh, almost rolling sound quite different from the "weet", "chewet" or "tchekweet" calls of the Little Tern. Several other features that grabbed the attention of three of us immediately were (a) the very white appearance of the birds, the upper parts being only slightly darker than the under parts; (b) the very thin black leading edge to the primaries; (c) the longer, more attenuated body to the rear of the wings; and (d) the clean-cut black eye-stripe running to and around the nape where it broadened a little. The crown was white. The bill and legs were black. Size was a little larger than the Little Tern.

The birds were initially and simultaneously seen by Adrian Boyle (South Australia), Jon Fallaw (Broome Bird Observatory) and myself (Tony Tree, a South African tern freak) and quickly picked up by Jubio Takeda (Japan) and Alan Clarke (CALM, Perth). I identified the bird immediately.

A. J. Tree

ASIAN DOWITCHER

On 25/11/95 I saw an unusual wader on the edge of the breakwater on the eastern side of Woodman Point. It was in an area where there is a small patch of sand between rocky patches. The single bird was slightly apart from a group of Bar-tailed Godwits. It looked like a godwit but was much greyer in colouring and was definitely smaller than the nearby Bar-tailed Godwits, and looked plump in comparison. The bill was black, very thick and straight, not curved like the godwits. There was a noticeable line from the bill through the eye to the nape, below a marked supercilium. The legs were black.

The bird had been flushed onto the rocks, about half way up the breakwater, by passing motorcyclists. When moving from rock to rock it called with a single note which was rather difficult to hear above the other noise in the area. It flushed twice as I tried to get closer to it, and each time it flew quickly to a point further along the edge of the breakwater. When flying, it showed a very white underwing but no noticeable rump like the Bar-tailed Godwits. The bird flew out of sight before further observations could be made.

I was able to approach to within 10-12 m of the bird in good conditions (late morning, sun behind me). I concluded that the bird was an Asian Dowitcher, a species I have seen a number of times before in the north-west, particularly at Port Hedland.

Peter Sandilands

Editors' Note: The above description is consistent with that of an Asian Dowitcher, but some interesting points are worth noting. The habitat is very unusual for an Asian Dowitcher - it is very rare to find them in rocky areas. They feed on muddy flats, and there are no such areas near Woodman Point. They are normally very quiet birds, and usually do not call very much. The Asian Dowitcher has a noticeable pale band across the wing covering the secondaries and the bases of the inner primaries. They also feed and fly differently from godwits. The Asian Dowitcher has only been reported twice previously in south-western Australia - once at Albany (WABN 51: 1-2) and once at Lake McLarty (WABN 63: 1). Observers should also watch out for other dowitcher species: a Long-billed Dowitcher was recently caught in a cannon net in Victoria (Wingspan 5(3): 40).

RED BACKED BUTTON-QUAIL

On Saturday 6th April 1996 I flushed what I believe was a Red-backed Button-quail on the edge of Roebuck Plain behind the Broome Bird Observatory. I have previously seen Brown Quail, Little Button-quail and Red-chested Button-quail in the same area.

The location is reached by walking along the Malurus Trail down the fence line, past the gate down to the corner of the fence where the track takes a bend to the right.

I reached the corner at about 16:30. My intention was to flush quail from the short to medium length grass. I had heard that Red-backed Button-quail had been seen here once or twice before.

At about 16:45 I saw a small quail just as it crossed the track and disappeared into the grass. I spent a while looking for it and trying to flush it but without success. I then spent some time walking out on to the salt marsh on the other side before coming back about 17:10. I soon heard what I had previously been told is a button quail call, made up of a series of deep 'ooms' slightly accelerating towards the end of about 8 to 10 calls. I walked through the grass to where I thought the call came from but again had no success. I imitated the call and I got a response about 30 metres away. I walked over but again had no success. I imitated the call and again heard a response about 20 metres away, but still did not see the bird. I imitated the call again and got another response, towards which I ran and a small quail flushed from close to me.

I got on to it with binoculars when it was about 15 metres away and it flew back across the track and landed near the fence about 50 metres away. The obvious features were its small button-quail size, its darkish colour above (compared to Little Button-quail), except for very distinct yellowish inside the wings and pale orange under-colour, very unlike the white of Little Button-quail or the deep orange of the female Red-chested Button-quail.

This meant that it was either a male Red-chested Button-quail or a Red-backed Button-quail. The yellowish colour inside the upper wing was very distinct which is why I believe that it was a Red-backed Button-quail. I didn't see any red behind the neck but I could have missed it, or maybe it was a male bird.

I quickly went over to where it landed but I could not flush it again.

I tried again with two other people the next day but we could not flush any quail in this area, although we put up 3 to 5 Red-chested Button-quail (male and female) within 500 metres or so out on the main plain. The female is unmistakable, and the male is a pale orange underneath and darkish above. We spent over an hour trying to flush quail in the grass. I didn't hear any calls even when I tried to imitate what I had heard the previous day.

Frank O'Connor

NOTE

See the important note regarding guidelines for WABN contributors in the 'Notices' section

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Notes for Contributors

The Editors request contributors to note:

- WABN publishes material of interest to the WA Group
- contributions should be clearly written or typed. If word processed, a copy of the file on disk would assist, especially if the manuscript is in Word for Windows format
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary
- a copy of the WABN style guide can be obtained from Perry House

Deadline for the September Issue

1 August 1996
at Perry House

Letters to the Editors

Eyre Bird Observatory

Having just spent an exciting week at EBO, I would like to commend the Wardens (Joye Wilson and Phillip Sharples) on their excellent work.

Nothing was too much trouble and both were informative and helpful — catering was exceptional.

The birdlife was amazing and I certainly added to my bird list.

Having been to Rotamah Island and Barren Grounds, Eyre 'takes the cake' for a birding holiday.

Miss W. Payne
40 Rowe St
EUROA, VIC 3666
23 March, 1996

Eyre Bird Observatory — Threat of Closure

WA Group members of the RAOU will be interested to know that the RAOU Council (in a letter dated 26 March 1996 from the President, Brian Snape, to the management committees of the Rotamah Island, Barren Grounds and Eyre Bird Observatories) is "... firmly of the opinion that RAOU should cease to be in charge of the three observatories that are located in State nature reserves or national parks...".

The basis of the argument is the poor remuneration for the wardens of the observatories. A change of sponsorship is proposed by the RAOU Council. The letter continues: "... If no other organisation or groups can be found to take charge of each observatory the RAOU will no longer bear the ultimate responsibility for allowing the current under-resourcing to continue and they will be closed...".

Representatives of those three observatories met with the Director in Melbourne early in May to discuss the situation (*see below - eds*). A notice similar to this one has been submitted to Melbourne for publication in Wingspan.

Members who feel strongly about this matter are urged to voice their concerns directly to those who determine the priorities of our organisation, the RAOU Council. The Head Office address is:

RAOU
415 Riversdale Rd
HAWTHORN EAST, VIC 3123
Fax: (03) 9882 2677

Rod Smith
Eyre Bird Observatory Management Committee

As a result of the above mentioned letter (a copy of which has been printed in the RAOU Annual Report 1995), a meeting was held between members of the Rotamah, Barren Grounds and Eyre Bird Observatory Management Committees, Brian Snape (President) and David Baker-Gabb (Director) at Melbourne RAOU Headquarters on 7 May 1996. Broome Bird Observatory was also represented by Clive Minton. Eyre Bird Observatory was represented by Doug Watkins and myself. At this meeting the concerns of Council and the Management Committees were discussed at length over four hours. The meeting was positive and productive. Resolutions were made towards increasing communication between RAOU Council and the Observatories' Management Committees with the agreed aim of taking action to improve the operation of observatories.

However, it appears that Council looks at observatories very differently from the way their management committees do (and maybe differently from that of RAOU members as well?!). RAOU Councils have consistently had observatories on a very low priority giving them minimal attention. In contrast, the present Council has given observatories considerable attention over the last 12 months (although, until now, without any consultation with the observatories

themselves) and appear to be asking questions such as: why do we have observatories? What do they do for the RAOU? Are they in the best location? Are they the best use of resources? It also appears that Council is questioning whether observatories are of a high enough standard and whether they are fulfilling their aims (e.g. being a centre for education, research and promoting the RAOU). There is an urgent need for us as RAOU members and supporters of observatories to communicate to Council how we value observatories and why. A commitment from Council to the continuation of observatories would, I feel, see their lot greatly improved.

Shapelle McNee
Member of Eyre Bird Observatory
Management Committee.

Editors' Note: All RAOU members will have received notice of this year's AGM. With the notice is reference to two motions, relating to the issue of the observatories, to be put to the meeting, an explanatory note from the Director of the RAOU and a copy of the letter sent to the observatory management committees by the President of the RAOU.

WA Group Reports

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 1995

The year followed the usual run of activities, in which the Hooded Plover Survey played a major part, under the direction of Brenda Newbey and Phyllis Bentley. The survey for this endangered species has been extended and looks as if it may continue indefinitely. The campout at Esperance in January 1995 discovered well over a thousand Hooded Plovers around Lake Gore, with similar numbers again in January this year.

The WA Database survey continued under Peter Sandilands, with over 100 000 entries; work progressed on analysing this information to discover any trends in bird movements.

A major activity concerned conservation. This entailed letters and discussions with Government bodies, consultants and others, on such topics as draft management plans, threats to habitat, and improving the environment.

Preliminary work started on a proposed project being run by Clive Nealon to survey suburban birds to discover loss or gain of species and other points of interest.

The program of excursions and campouts was ably handled by Bill McRoberts and Bryan Barrett, with outings in and around Perth, usually twice a month on a Saturday or Sunday, together with midweek outings for those unable to make weekends. Up to 20 members attended on each occasion. Longer outings with overnight camping were held further afield on long weekends, seeking a different range of birds and habitat. In the course of the year, there were 12 half-day excursions, 12 full-day ones, 16 midweek ones, 6 campouts, and one 24-hour Twitchathon organised by Clive Napier. We owe a vote of thanks to the many leaders of these outings for the time and trouble they undertook.

Allan Jones continued the excellent series of country brochures that he initiated in 1994, listing birds and where to see them in different country districts. Various shires and tourist bodies kept asking for more copies, leading us to suggest that they photocopy them.

