

# 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.

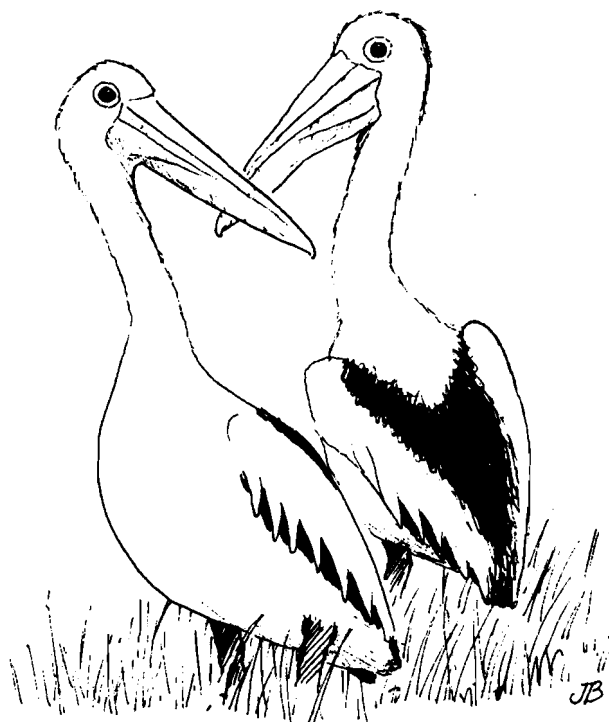
The overall reproduction rate of this colony had apparently been low.

**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. Singer

### 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, Rottnest Island - FO \* 1, 3/2/96, Government House Lake, Rottnest 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, Rottnest 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, Rottnest Island - FO \* ca. 50, 3/2/96, near Fay's Bay, Rottnest 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

RAOU Office (WA) Perry House  
71 Oceanic Drive,  
Floreat 6014

Telephone (09) 383 7749

Facsimile (09) 387 8412

Chairman Clive Napier  
69 Dean Road  
Bateman 6150  
Tel: (09) 332 7265

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)  
Fax. (09) 306 1641 (w)  
Tel/Fax (09) 306 1642 (h)  
Email. austecol@cygnus.uwa.edu.au

## 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.



Our major source of income is still the trading table, well managed by Clive and Wendy Napier, backed up by Clive Nealon who will take over fully in 1996.

Wendy Napier is also responsible for maintaining the roster of volunteers who staff the office on weekday mornings. Max Bailey, the office manager, kept the place in excellent order, whilst Helen Clark looked after the library which now contains a creditable range of reference books on birds.

Judy Blyth, our enthusiastic publicity officer, continued to put together thematic display material for showing at schools, functions and elsewhere.

Under joint editors, John Blyth and Allan Burbidge, *WA Bird Notes* gave us stimulating articles and all the news about birding in WA. The arduous job of typing material for the newsletter is done by our tireless secretary, Margaret Philippon. Roger Watson helped with the technical setting up of the Bird Notes, whilst Rod Smith organised printing and distribution, in addition to his other task on the long-standing survey on the mounds of Malleefowl and the distribution of this species.

Bryan Barrett and Margery Clegg continued their work with the Wader Study Group and the project for encouraging birds on farms and the preservation of remnant vegetation.

Jeremy Talbot has been a tower of strength in ably organising the list of speakers for our monthly meetings, at which Mary Vaughan ran the tea and coffee.

The Treasurer, Peter Anson, took care of our finances and undertook all sorts of other jobs that needed attention.

We continue to be well supported by a stalwart body of volunteers without whose help we might be in difficulties.

Our relations with the RAOU in Melbourne continued to be cordial and satisfying, likewise our relations with the WA Wildflower Society, our fellow-tenants in Perry House.

Finally, I must pay tribute to colleagues on the Committee whose wise counsel and experience have been of the greatest assistance. In this connection, Margaret Philippon, the Secretary, provided a truly professional polish to all her duties.

The WA Group showed no signs of drooping feathers in 1995.

Thank you.

**Brian Wilson**

#### **DATABASE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BIRDS**

In his second report on the database (WABN No 51 — September 1989), the then coordinator Clive Napier said, *'In ten years when there will be 100 000 records it will be a really worthwhile source of information when submissions for government are being prepared and, due to its size and age will carry considerable weight'*. It took just over half that time — five and a half years — to reach that figure last year. Now at the end of summer 1996, over 124 000 records have been entered into the database covering 459 species at 452 sites.

Last year's annual report (WABN No 74 — June 1995) listed 58 species for which the database had fewer than ten sightings recorded. Of these, ten have now been removed from the list. Readers' response to the Robins article in WABN No 76 (December 1995) was why the Mangrove Robin was one of those ten. Six more species including the Princess Parrot have been added, so that the number of species with fewer than ten sightings is now 54. The annual check of Malleefowl records sees 21 sightings added this year, but again a large number of these (15) were from the Eyre Bird Observatory

and the Nuytsland Nature Reserve. The remaining six records were from Carmamah Shire, Gnowangerup Shire, Mt Elvire State Forest and Peniup Nature Reserve. It is pleasing to have a small increase in the number of locations with sightings this year.

A grant from the Gordon Reid Foundation for Conservation was used to further upgrade the computer software of the database, send a special newsletter publicising the database to all WA members and print a new checklist of Birds of WA (for use when current stocks run out). In addition, one article using the database records has been published — *'Robins: Are They Declining?'* — and at least two more are in the planning stage. During the year a complete audit of database records was carried out and many errors corrected. As at 8 September 1995 when the audit was finalised, 2862 cards (lists) had been entered into the computer. A number of sites have been regularly visited over the life of the database and Table 1 shows those locations that have had 30 or more checklists submitted for them. The 22 locations comprise just 4.9% of the total locations but account for 42.8% of the total number of checklists. We would like to receive more checklists from locations other than those listed in Table 1. With the continuing support of the members sending checklists in, a request was made for assistance to enter data into the computer in WABN No 74 (June 1995) and WABN No 76 (December 1995). As from January this year, Mary Vaughan, Viv Dare and George Agar began entering data from the checklists into the computer on Thursday mornings. Many people have contributed lists to the database over the years. We would like to thank all those who have, at some time, supported the project. It would not be where it is today without that support.

Location	No of Checklists	% of Checklists
Alfred Cove Nature Reserve	50	1.7
Amarillo Pool	31	1.1
Argyle Diamond Mine Area	58	2.0
Bibra Lake	55	1.9
Bickley Brook	79	2.8
Broome Bird Observatory	90	3.1
Dryandra Woodland	91	3.2
Eyre Bird Observatory	38	1.3
Fitzgerald River National Park	40	1.4
Flynn Road Forest Reserve	41	1.4
Herdsmen Lake	50	1.7
John Forrest National Park	36	1.3
Lake Chandala Nature Reserve	53	1.9
Lake Joondalup	80	2.8
Lake Monger	56	2.0
Nuytsland Nature Reserve	37	1.3
Piney Lakes	30	1.1
Pipidinny Road	54	1.9
Porongurup National Park	49	1.7
Stirling Range National Park	64	2.2
Stoney Brook	109	3.8
Wungong Gorge	35	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1226</b>	<b>42.8</b>

**Table 1:** Locations in the Database of Western Australian Birds that have 30 or more checklists submitted for them (as at 8 September 1995).

Please keep sending those checklists in and the database will continue to grow as Clive Napier envisaged. Note that the Suburban Bird Survey is not replacing this project; the Database of Western Australian Birds is still very much a going concern.

Any other members who are interested in collating and keying information into the database are invited to contact the Office Manager and joint coordinator, Max Bailey. For more information on the Database of Western Australian Birds Project contact the office. Detailed inquiries can be addressed to the coordinators who are usually in the office on Wednesday and Thursday mornings.

**Peter Sandilands and Max Bailey**  
Database of WA Birds Project Coordinators

### **RAOU (WA GROUP) COMMITTEE**

Meetings of the WA Group Committee are held on the third Wednesday of each month at Perry House.

It is through the committee that the business of the RAOU (WA Group) is managed. Matters for consideration by the committee should be communicated to the office with adequate time for distribution to committee members.

Recent committee meetings have dealt with the following:

- Hooded Plover Project – as reported in the March issue of *WA Bird Notes*, this project is still very active and a grant of \$5000 has just been received from the Lotteries Commission (Gordon Reid Foundation) to assist in meeting costs.
- Birds on Farms Project – application has been made to the National Landcare Program for a grant of \$15 000 to fund this project (to cover the cost of a part-time coordinator and other expenses) and in the meantime, the sub-committee is taking steps to ensure that it will be 'all systems go' if and when approval is advised; RAOU HQ is supporting this project which will fit neatly with its national program.
- Conservation issues: Ramsar Convention – protection of WA wader areas – letter sent to Minister urging more management; Bungendore Park proposed draft management plan; Wellard wetlands – Alcoa is seeking RAOU assistance in setting up nest boxes and carrying out regular surveys of the site — Bryan Barrett is liaising with them; Amarillo Pool area – proposed development by Homeswest for up to 22 000 homes – the Chairman has written to the Minister for the Environment advising that this site is regarded as significant for birds (approximately 110 species including the Long-toed Stint) and that we therefore support the objections of the Departments of Planning and Waters & Rivers as reported in the media recently; Byenup Lagoon - increasing salinity – a draft management plan for the Lake Muir/Uncup wetlands will be out for public comment soon, and will make recommendations relevant to this issue.
- Reports, etc., received – Karijini National Park draft management plan; Yenyenning Lakes, Beverley – proposed draft management plan; Canning River Regional Park draft management plan 1995-2005; EPA – Sustainable Development in the Rangelands of WA (position statement).
- Survey of Suburban Birds Project – Clive Nealon is

receiving survey reports from members and is gratified with the response so far – about 4000 individual bird reports with approximately 152 species!

- Eyre Bird Observatory – supporting submission for Australian Heritage Commission grant, although advice has since been received that EBO (and Rotamah and Barren Grounds) may be closed down within two years, due to insufficient funding. Various alternative methods of funding and management are being investigated to avoid final closure.
- Proposal to record general meetings – this suggestion by a member, as a way of informing those who cannot attend general meetings, was passed on to a sound recording expert who advised that it would require professional quality equipment and personnel; the committee therefore decided it would be more feasible to advise members through its quarterly report, and a summary of the proceedings of general meetings, in *Bird Notes*, and it is hoped that these two avenues of information will be satisfactory to members.
- Disturbance to birdlife by eco-tours and use of audio tapes – the RAOU HQ Conservation Committee is seeking views of members on this matter, and proposes to prepare a draft policy with the assistance of member groups.
- Excursion reports.
- Updating of photographic slide collection.
- Publicity – various displays set up during the recent months including council libraries, Earthcare Festival at York, Health and Environment Conference at Radisson Hotel, and talks given to various community groups.
- Trading Table: some new lines being tried.
- Finances – 1996 budget and reports on current finances – all going well, with approximately \$5000 set aside for special projects.
- Library accessions.
- New venue for general meetings (Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley) — see the notice on page 1 in this issue.

## **Members' Contributions**

### **LAKE MCLARTY: AN IMPORTANT RAMSAR WETLAND**

Lake McLarty is part of a complex wetland system which forms the Peel-Yalgorup Ramsar site (CALM 1990). The Ramsar site includes Peel Inlet, Harvey Estuary, Lakes Mealup and McLarty and the Yalgorup lakes (Lake Clifton, Lake Preston, Duck Pond, Boundary Lake, Lake Pollard, Martins Tank, Lake Yalgorup, Lake Hayward, North and South Newnham Lake) This system meets all three criteria for being of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. The Peel-Yalgorup system is (1) a particularly good example of a near natural wetland representative of the region, (2) is of special value for several species and (3) regularly supports 20 000 waterbirds and greater than 1% of the individuals of several waterbirds.

A site qualifies as internationally important under the Ramsar Convention if it meets at least one of the criteria. Lake

McLarty itself does so with respect to the specific criteria based on waterbirds. Under these criteria, a wetland is considered internationally important if:

- (a) it regularly supports 20 000 waterbirds; or
- (b) where data on populations are available, it regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or sub-species of waterbird.

We follow Watkins (1993) in interpreting "regularly support" to mean at least once, because Australian wetlands are often rather ephemeral and waders need a network of wetlands to enable them to move in response to changes in water levels. For migratory waders, we use the population numbers of Watkins (1993), i.e. the number of birds of that species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. A site supporting 1% of the birds of a given species in the flyway is of international importance and a site supporting 1% of the Australian population is of national importance. Waterbirds are those species considered by Jaensch et al. (1988) to be dependent on water.

Lake McLarty, together with Lake Mealup and a connecting corridor, is also listed on the Register of the National Estate. The significance of this area to the National Estate is primarily related to waterbirds (Australian Heritage Commission 1990) but the full significance of the lake for waterbirds has only recently been appreciated, and not fully documented. Jaensch and Lane (1993) listed and described Lake McLarty together with several other wetlands (including Lake Mealup) in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia.

In order to provide an up-to-date assessment of the value of Lake McLarty itself to waterbirds, we collated data from various RAOU databases, including counts from the extended South-west Waterbird Usage Survey (Jaensch et al. 1988, RAOU/CALM unpublished), Scopewest survey (Storey et al. 1993), personal counts, personal communications from other observers, and records published in WA Bird Notes. These were compared with the data of Jaensch et al. (1993) and Watkins (1993) to provide a regional, national and international context.

Seven species have been recorded breeding (Table 1) but this number would no doubt be increased through searches at appropriate times of year.

On 25 February 1996 one of us (MC) counted 26 690 waterbirds on Lake McLarty. This figure is well over the threshold of 20 000 which is required for international significance. The previous summer, on 7 January 1995, 19 573 waterbirds were counted, suggesting that further counts at this time of year will result in the finding of more occasions when the threshold is exceeded.

Lake McLarty is internationally significant for populations of at least four species: Curlew Sandpiper (count 3000; criterion 2500), Red-necked Avocet (3000; 1070), Red-necked Stint (8000; 4710), Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (2699; 1660) (Table 2). It meets the criterion of national significance for at least four species: Marsh Sandpiper (count 142; criterion 90) and Wood Sandpiper (112; 60), and the counts of Long-toed Stints and Pectoral Sandpipers are the highest from Australia. McLarty is regionally significant for at least 15 species of waterbirds (Table 2).

A total of 72 species of waterbirds has been recorded at Lake McLarty, plus the Yellow Wagtail which is dependent on wetlands when it occurs in Australia. This total is the third

highest in southern Western Australia, following Alfred Cove (84 species) and Vasse-Wonnerup (78 species).

These figures show that, as well as being already listed as internationally significant as one part of a complex of wetlands, Lake McLarty itself meets Ramsar criteria for international significance (criteria 3b, 3c) and should be afforded maximum protection. In particular, a management plan should be formulated as a high priority and protection should be given to the surrounding area. Already, there is a subdivision on the western side, and this is likely to result in a number of negative impacts on the lake. Further such impacts should be avoided if possible.

**Allan Burbidge and Mike Craig**

#### References:

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**Table 1:** Records of waterbirds breeding at Lake McLarty.

Species	Reference
Musk Duck	Jaensch et al. 1988.
Black Swan	Jaensch et al. 1988; Storey et al. 1993 (Scopewest).
Great Crested Grebe	Anon. (1983) in WABN 25: 3; Jaensch et al. 1988.
Spotless Crake	Jaensch et al. 1988.
Purple Swamphen	Jaensch et al. 1988.
Eurasian Coot	Jaensch et al. 1988.
Red-capped Plover	J. Hunt (1990) in WABN 54: 7-8; T. Kirkby pers. comm.

**Table 2:** Maximum counts for individual waterbird species at Lake McLarty, with comments on their significance. (Ranks from Jaensch et al. 1993; population estimates for Australia and the East Asian - Australasian Flyway from Watkins 1993)

Species	Max. no. recorded	Rank in SW wetlands	1% of national pop.	1% of flyway pop.	Comments
Blue-billed Duck	32				
Musk Duck	96				
Freckled Duck	2				declared threatened in WA
Black Swan	1104				
Australian Shelduck	4500				
Australian Wood Duck	6				
Pacific Black Duck	3950	7th			
Australasian Shoveler	487				
Grey Teal	13 108	6th			regionally significant
Chestnut Teal	1				
Pink-eared Duck	2480				
Hardhead	61				
Australasian Grebe	55				
Hoary-headed Grebe	1692	5th			regionally significant
Great Crested Grebe	28				
Darter	30	=1st			
Little Pied Cormorant	143				
Little Black Cormorant	166				
Great Cormorant	16				
Australian Pelican	164	4th			
White-faced Heron	300	4th			regionally significant
Little Egret	1				
White-necked Heron	4				
Great Egret	182	3rd			regionally significant
Nankeen Night Heron	25				
Australasian Bittern	1				nationally threatened species
Glossy Ibis	29	1st			highest count in SW Australia
Australian White Ibis	150	=3rd			regionally significant
Straw-necked Ibis	45				
Royal Spoonbill	1				
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	200	2nd			regionally significant
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	2	=1st			
Swamp Harrier	3				
Baillon's Crake	1				
Australian Spotted Crake	8	=2nd			
Spotless Crake	8				
Purple Swamphen	26				
Dusky Moorhen	1				
Black-tailed Native-hen	24				
Eurasian Coot	10 000	3rd			regionally significant
Pin-tailed Snipe	1				
Black-tailed Godwit	65	1st	810	1620	regionally significant
Marsh Sandpiper	142	2nd	90	900	nationally significant
Common Greenshank	103		200	400	regionally significant
Wood Sandpiper	112	1st	60	600	nationally significant
Common Sandpiper	1				
Ruddy Turnstone	1				
Asian Dowitcher	1			200	one of only three sites where recorded in southern WA
Red Knot	1				
Little Stint	1				recorded at only three sites in southern WA
Red-necked Stint	8000	3rd	3530	4710	internationally significant

Long-toed Stint	96	1st			highest count in Australia; annually an important site; at least national significance
Pectoral Sandpiper	12	=1st			probably highest count in Australia; occurs regularly
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	3000	1st	1660	1660	internationally significant
Curlew Sandpiper	3000	1st	1880	2500	internationally significant
Broad-billed Sandpiper	2	=1st	80	160	few records from SW Australia
Ruff	5	1st			highest number recorded in SW Australia; occurs regularly in small numbers
Black-winged Stilt	1580	6th	2660	5320	regionally significant
Banded Stilt	1000		2060	2060	regionally significant
Red-necked Avocet	5000	1st	1070	1070	highest count in SW Australia; internationally significant
Pacific Golden Plover	4				
Little Ringed Plover	1				very few records from SW Australia
Red-capped Plover	690		950	950	regionally significant
Black-fronted Dotterel	26				
Red-kneed Dotterel	90	=3rd			regionally significant
Oriental Pratincole	10	1st			rarely seen in SW Australia
Silver Gull	300				
Caspian Tern	7				
Whiskered Tern	25				
White-winged Black Tern	110	=2nd			regionally significant
Yellow Wagtail	1				only 5 records from SW Australia
Clamorous Reed-Warbler	2				
Little Grassbird	15				

## FEATHER-EATING GREBES

Since my article about Great Crested Grebes appeared in the March edition of *WA Bird Notes*, more information has come to hand. A discussion about the grebe's feather-eating habits with Eric McCrum of the Herdsman Wildlife Centre prompted him to delve into his library. There he found a book whose author has a different opinion as to what happens to the feathers after they are ingested.

David Seth-Smith, in *Birds of Our Country* Volume 1, Hutchinson & Co., writing about Great Crested Grebes, states: "*The old ones give some of their own feathers to the chicks to eat, and these will even help themselves from their parents' coats. All the large grebes are confirmed feather-eaters, but they do not throw up the feathers in pellets as has been stated: like the bones of fish eaten, the feathers are ingested, or at least broken up*".

So now we have two divergent views on this subject. It would be interesting to know if any of our members has ever seen a Great Crested Grebe disgorge a pellet.

Mavis Norgard

## DESTRUCTION OF NESTS OF FAIRY-WRENS BY RAVENS

While walking at North Lake, in Melville, last summer, I noticed a Splendid Fairy-wren building her nest in the canopy of a paperbark tree, nearly four metres from the ground. Unfortunately, as soon as it was finished, it was destroyed by a group of Australian Ravens which were constantly in that

area. Undaunted, the wren built again in another paperbark nearby, this time close to five metres up. I have never before seen a Splendid Fairy-wren build a nest higher than one and a half metres from the ground, and more usually less than that. Perhaps a shortage of suitable lower level vegetation in the vicinity may have caused her to take to the canopy. However, her second effort fared no better than the first and was again destroyed just as it was finished.

A pair of Willie Wagtails who built a nest at a lower level in a eucalypt only 25 metres away fared better. Every time the ravens came anywhere near that tree they were attacked and harassed with such persistence that they would depart, though only temporarily. The wagtails must have expended an enormous amount of energy doing this, but they did fledge their three offspring.

Mavis Norgard

## HOODED PLOVERS AT LAKE GORE

The recent campout at Esperance (*WA Bird Notes*, No. 77, March 1996) confirmed the unusual importance of Lake Gore as a refuge for Hooded Plovers. An estimated 930 birds out of a total of 1220 birds seen in the Esperance area were recorded at this site. In contrast, relatively few were seen at other lakes in the Esperance area. The question immediately arises as to why this particular lake should attract so many birds? A glance at a map of the area (Sheet No 3230, *National Topographic Map Series*, 1:100 000) suggests a possible explanation.

Unlike most other lakes in the Esperance area, Lake Gore is fed by an extensive surface drainage system. The Dalyup river rises some 30 kms further north and is later joined by the West Dalyup. In all, the total area of the catchment exceeds 500 kms<sup>2</sup>, almost all of which has now been cleared for farming. Given the link between clearance and salinity, it is reasonable to conclude that Lake Gore is probably more saline than other lakes in the vicinity. This is borne out by the extensive salt encrustation of the 'lagoons' at the eastern end of the lake at the time of our visit. This, of course, implies that there is also a strong connection between water salinity and food supply.

At this stage, supporting evidence is lacking but, from a scientific point of view, this hypothesis is one which might well repay further investigation. It should not be difficult to get water samples from the various lakes in the Esperance area analysed. Establishing what the birds at Lake Gore are feeding on might provide a bigger challenge but the answer would go a long way towards explaining the distribution of the Hooded Plovers in this State.

Stewart Houghton

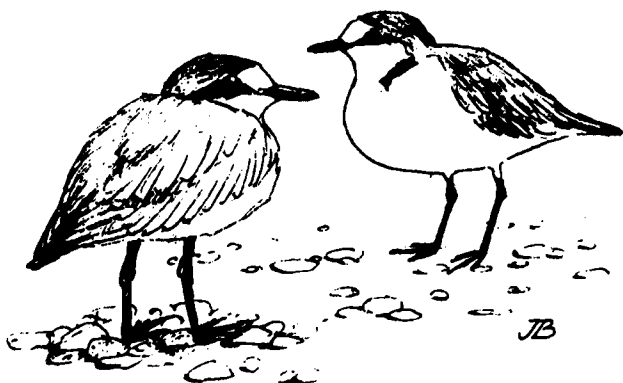
### RED-CAPPED PLOVERS ON THE MOVE

On the afternoon of 23 February at Baandee Lakes which lies between Doodlakine and Hines Hill, a stop was made specifically to search (in vain) for Hooded Plover. Eight species of waterbird were present. Most interesting was a very large number – in excess of 500 – Red-capped Plovers, some feeding, some resting. The temperature was in excess of 40°C. The search was not completed but as we intended to return the same way a few days later it was decided to do a complete search then. Accordingly, on 27 February, a much more pleasant afternoon, all the water bodies were checked and counts made. Now there was noticeably less water and this made the site appear all the more attractive for Red-capped Plovers as there were wide damp shores, but only seven were found.

Other waterbirds present were Hoary-headed Grebe (19); Australasian Shelduck (19); Grey Teal (156); Red-necked Avocet (115); Black-Winged Stilt (7); Greenshank (3); Silver Gull (34). Although a count had not been made initially it is certain that at least 90% of the Black-winged Stilts had also gone.

It is unusual to see so many Red-capped Plovers together and no explanation can be offered for that or for their disappearance.

Brenda Newbey and T Giles



Red-capped Plovers by Judy Blyth

### BIRDING ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND, INDIAN OCEAN

Christmas Island is truly an island paradise. It is surrounded by coral reefs and is covered in tropical rainforest. It also has many unique plants and animals and supports large colonies of nesting seabirds. If it is birds you want to see then I can scarcely recommend a better place.

The island is fairly small (137 km<sup>2</sup>) and rises abruptly out of the north-east Indian Ocean about 600 km south of Java. The coastline is composed almost entirely of steep limestone cliffs and there are only six beaches on the island, all except the one at Flying Fish Cove being very small. The limestone cliffs support a type of rainforest called coastal terrace forest which is quite different floristically from the rainforest found on the plateau which is called, not surprisingly, plateau forest. These were the two major habitats on the island until the coming of man last century. Since then grassy clearings and gardens have provided suitable habitat for several recent colonists.

The island is rapidly gaining popularity amongst birders as a holiday destination not only because it supports four endemic species and six endemic subspecies but also because the birds are abundant and easy to see. Good information on the birds and where to see them can be found in Reville (1989) and Carter (1994). I spent 12 days on the island from the 3rd to 12th January 1996 seeing 28 species of birds which are listed below. I have tried to mention the best places to see each species and have also tried to give population estimates for the land birds where these have not been made before.

**Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*)** The most abundant seabird on the island and hundreds were seen every day. The species nests mainly in the coastal terrace forest and can be found all around the island including the settlement. They are, however, mostly absent from the plateau forest. The population was recently estimated as 5000 pairs.

**Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)** This ground nesting species was common and several were seen every day. It breeds right around the coast and flocks were often seen fishing around the settlement. It is absent from the plateau forest. The population was recently estimated as 2000 pairs.

**Abbott's Booby (*Sula abbotti*)** This endangered species breeds only in the plateau rainforest in the central and western parts of the island. The best way to see them is to drive onto the plateau about 40 minutes before dusk and watch the adults come in to feed their fledglings. I did this on four evenings and was successful each time. I also saw one bird around the settlement and another off the west coast but apparently it is not usual to see birds away from the rainforest. The population is about 1800 pairs but only 700 breed in any one year as the fledglings take two years to raise.

**Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*)** This species is very common and dozens were seen every day. They breed all over the island but mainly in the central and western parts and around the settlement they are greatly outnumbered by the Christmas Island Frigatebird. The best place to get close views of both the frigatebirds is at the phosphate mine's tailing ponds west of the main settlement. Here the birds swoop down to drink the freshwater, affording magnificent views. The population on the island is about 3000 pairs.

**Christmas Island Frigatebird (*Fregata andrewsi*)** This endangered species breeds only in the north-east part of the island and has a population of about 2000 pairs. Fortunately the main breeding area is right next to the settlement and I

saw hundreds everyday soaring above the settlement. Elsewhere on the island I only saw the odd bird.

**Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*)** This widespread species is common with up to 15 birds seen every day. Breeds right around the coast and often seen fishing offshore from the settlement.

**White-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon lepturus*)** Called the Golden Bosunbird by locals, this stunning species is very common and up to 30 were seen everyday. The vast majority of birds on the island are of the beautiful golden morph with a rich apricot flush to their plumage. However I did see two birds of the white morph which lacked this colour. This seems to support the currently held view that the two colour types are only different morphs rather than separate subspecies (HANZAB Vol. 1). There are about 3000 pairs on the island.

**White-faced Heron (*Egretta novaehollandiae*)** This recently arrived colonist is not common and I only saw a total of five individuals. A single bird was seen at the rubbish tip and a pair was spotlighted on two separate nights at the golf course. Probably not more than 25 individuals on the island.

**Pied Heron (*Egretta picata*)** There is but one individual of the species on the island who arrived several years ago. It has, however, taken up residence on the lawn at the casino resort and is easy to find.

**Eastern Reef Egret (*Egretta sacra*)** This is the rarest of the resident species and about 25 pairs breed around the coast. I saw three dark and three light morph birds.

**Christmas Island Goshawk (*Accipiter fasciatus natalis*)** This species is found all over the island but is not common and I only saw a total of six individuals. The population has recently been estimated at between 50 and 100 pairs although probably closer to the lower estimate. Fortunately three of the birds I saw were juveniles which suggests they are breeding well. This subspecies bears little resemblance to Australian Brown Goshawks and it seems likely that it will soon be transferred to another species.

**Nankeen Kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*)** This recently arrived colonist is now very common at the settlement and all grassy areas around the island. Its population would be at least several hundred pairs.

**White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)** Another recently arrived colonist which is most easily seen at the ANCA office at the west end of the settlement. Several other pairs have been reported around the island. Probably no more than 25 birds on the island but the population is increasing.

**Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)** One individual was seen on the lawn of the Governor's House in Flying Fish Cove.

**Snipe (*Gallinago* spp.)** One individual was seen along a grassy track near North-west Point. Views were brief so no guess can be made as to its specific identity.

**Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)** One individual was seen in Flying Fish Cove for the duration of my stay. Although the bird had been present since mid-November (R. Hill, personal communication) it had not been reported before and is a new addition to the island list. Close views of the bird's upperwing pattern confirmed it was not the closely related Saunders' Tern (*Sterna saundersi*).

**Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)** One individual of the species was seen in Flying Fish Cove on 9th January. It was gone the next day. A new addition to the island list.

**Common Noddy (*Anous stolidus*)** This is the most abundant seabird on the island after the Red-footed Booby. About 5 000 pairs breed right around the coast including the settlement and hundreds were seen everyday.

**Christmas Island Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula whartoni*)** The magnificent bird is very common throughout the island and is often seen around the settlement. Its presence is readily revealed by its loud call *croo-croo-croo*. Its population was estimated at only 10 to 100 pairs in 1975 (HANZAB Vol. 3) but it must have undergone a population explosion as I would now estimate that there are at least 3000 pairs throughout the island.

**Christmas Island Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica natalis*)** This species is found throughout the island but is quite elusive. However a walk through rainforest should reveal one or two and up to eight were seen in any one day. I found the best place to see them was along the road down to Dolly Beach on the east coast although I had magnificent views of the grey-capped male on the lawn at the ANCA office. The population was recently estimated to be about 1000 pairs which is consistent with my observations.

**Christmas Island Hawk-Owl (*Ninox squamipila natalis*)** This species is common throughout the island including the forest around the settlement and I saw a total of eight individuals. Its two note call, not unlike that of our Southern Boobook, could be heard at night from nearly everywhere on the island. The best way to view this elusive species is to go spotlighting at night near the golf clubhouse. I had no luck on the first two nights but was rewarded on the third night with magnificent views of a pair that were so unconcerned by my presence that they copulated twice in front of me! Richard Hill has just completed his research on the species (see *Wingspan* 14: 5-7) and estimated the population to be about 600 pairs.

**Christmas Island Glossy Swiftlet (*Collocalia esculenta natalis*)** This species is very common around the island and hundreds were seen on most days. It is mostly seen along clearings and pathways in the rainforest although it is also common around the settlement. It is difficult to estimate numbers but I would say that 10 000 individuals was probably conservative.

**Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)** The species is an uncommon visitor. The only sightings I made were of a flock of five at the rubbish tip and two flocks of six and three around the settlement.

**Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)** This species is a locally common migrant to the island. The only place I saw them was along the road to Dolly Beach on the east side of the island but at least four individuals were present along this road. Two of the birds were moulting into breeding plumage and had mostly black throats.

**Christmas Island Thrush (*Turdus poliocephalus natalis*)** This ridiculously tame bird is very common throughout the island despite the presence of feral cats. Up to several dozen were seen each day and I would estimate there were at least 20 000 individuals on the island.

**Christmas Island White-eye (*Zosterops natalis*)** This attractive species is the most abundant bird on the island and I would estimate that the population was at least 50 000 individuals. It was common in all habitats and hundreds were seen everyday. It has quite a vocal repertoire and the contact notes are quite different to the Silvereye.



**Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)** This introduced species is found only around the settlement. Even within this area it is almost exclusively confined to a narrow strip along the coast. Its population is probably no more than several hundred birds and it should be easy to eradicate. It seems desirable to do so before the population increases any further.

**Java Sparrow (*Padda oryzivora*)** This attractive species is found only at the settlement and is mainly confined to the area around Poon Saan and the ANCA office. A flock of 65 individuals was seen but the population is unlikely to be more than 150. Again it seems desirable to eradicate this species while numbers remain low.

As can be seen from the list the island is a mecca for birdwatchers because of the great abundance of birdlife and current conservation measures should ensure it remains so for the foreseeable future. Whilst phosphate mining stripped the island of 30% of its rainforest all mining activity has now ceased and nearly all of the remaining forest is protected within the national park. The island's birds seem to have survived predation by introduced rats and cats rather well but of further concern is the recent introduction of the Wolf Snake (*Lycodon capucinus*). While primarily a danger to the local geckos it may also pose a threat to birds. The related Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*) has been implicated in the extinction of numerous small passerines from the island of Guam in the Pacific. Unfortunately it seems that nothing is being done to try and eradicate this arboreal predator and it is not clear how this snake can be controlled. Only time will tell.

However, birds are not the only attraction and the island is one of the best snorkeling and diving places in the world with many beautiful coral gardens. I recorded a total of 236 species of fish on nine separate dives. On a 90 minute dive I recorded 144 species of fish. Even for the landlubbers there is plenty else of interest on land. There are six endemic reptiles although they are all elusive and hard to find; the same can't be said of the crabs! The island holds the last remaining viable population of Robber Crab, the world's largest land crab, which stands over a foot in height. These awesome creatures are commonly seen, except around the settlement, and should be treated with respect. By far the most abundant creature on the island is the Red Crab. There are 120 million of them crammed into the island and in some places you have to walk extremely slowly to let the crabs scuttle out of the way before you can put down your foot – seriously! The sight of the coastal cliffs painted red with millions of tiny crab megopala was one of the highlights of the trip.

The island is only a four-and-a-half hour flight from Perth and flights leave twice a week. Another option is to fly to Jakarta and then take a weekend casino charter to the island. The second option is cheaper but takes much longer. I found that 12 days was about the ideal amount of time to stay on the island. Any less than that and you tend to find yourself rushing around to see everything. However the island is not that big and 12 days was plenty of time to see the whole island (on the other hand you could stay for months and try to work out all those juvenile frigatebirds). The best way to see the island is to hire a car and there are several places in the settlement that hire cars at \$20-25 per day. They are no luxury limousine but they get you from A to B. There are also about four places that require a four-wheel drive to reach and they can all be visited in one day. Although the four-wheel drives are \$65 per day I

would recommend hiring one for a day as the spots are interesting and well worth a visit. Accommodation on the island is very limited and what is available is relatively expensive. One option is to stay at the five-star casino which is a 15 minute drive from the settlement. It is very expensive (\$100-200/night) and is quite isolated which has both its advantages and disadvantages. The other option is to stay in the Lodge in Poon Saan although this is also quite expensive (\$70 per night) but is very convenient and the rooms are very clean. Eating out on the island is not expensive and most of the cuisine is Chinese.

There are many highlights from my trip. The crab megopala that painted the cliffs red, the monster Robber Crab at the golf course that stood taller than my knee, the Abbott's Booby chick being fed by its parents and the Christmas Island Hawk Owls that copulated twice only 10 metres in front of me. However the lasting memory of the island for me will be the frigatebirds. Hundreds of them soaring all through the day above the settlement on huge two metre wingspans. I have never seen so many large birds in my life and their mastery of the air left me breathless. Christmas Island is not a cheap holiday destination but if you are interested in the natural world, and birds in particular, and you have the money then you must go. It is worth every cent.

Mike Craig

#### References:

Carter, M. 1994. Birds of Australia's Christmas Island. *Wingspan* 13: 18-21.

Reville, B.J. 1989. *A Visitor's Guide to the Birds of Christmas Island, Indian Ocean*. (Christmas Island Natural History Association, Christmas Island).

#### BIRDS ON THE GROUND DURING HOT WEATHER

In February I travelled with two friends from Brisbane on a birding trip to Monkey Mia, Carnarvon and elsewhere. The first couple of days coincided with very hot weather and strong, hot and dry easterly winds. I was very surprised to find a lot of birds sheltering on the ground.

We stopped for lunch at the Galena Bridge where the North West Coastal Highway crosses the Murchison River. It was 11 am and the temperature was 48°C by noon. In the shade on the ground of the river bank we found four Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes, three Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, two Rufous Whistlers, one Crested Bellbird and one Sacred Kingfisher roosting quite close together on the ground. There were also about ten Yellow-rumped Thornbills and two White-winged Fairy-wrens moving around in the shade close by. On the other bank we also saw a male Mistletoebird roosting on the ground in the shade.

At about 2 pm we were travelling from the Overlander Roadhouse to Denham when we stopped a few times. The temperature was (only!) about 42°C but there was still a hot dry easterly wind. At one point we found a male Hooded Robin in the base of a mulga tree. Shortly after we found another male in the base of a mulga tree, with the female and six Varied Sittellas in the sand next to the base of the tree.

The next day on our way to Carnarvon we stopped for lunch at the Hamelin Pool Caravan Park. It was cooler than the previous day but there was still a hot dry breeze. There was a sprinkler running and nearby in the shade on the ground we found two Pied Butcherbirds, two Diamond Doves, one

Black-eared Cuckoo and several Richard's Pipits. We approached the cuckoo to about 5 metres without too much difficulty. We finally got too close but when we backed off it returned.

At about 13.30 we stopped at an artesian bore close to the highway on Carbla Station. The bird life was fantastic with 34 species although only a few were roosting on the ground. These included a male White-winged Triller, about six Mulga Parrots, a few Black-faced Woodswallows and some Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters (which were abundant). Other interesting birds coming in to drink included a male Orange Chat, two Masked Woodswallows and two Budgerigars.

A couple of days later we again stopped at Carbla Station. It was much cooler and the wind had dropped. There were far fewer birds although a Black-eared Cuckoo flew in and sat in a tree for a long time.

I assume that the birds on the ground were sheltering from the heat and the hot wind, although I have not seen this behaviour in similar conditions at Argyle in the Kimberley or in areas around the south west. I wouldn't have previously expected to see Varied Sittellas, Mistletoebirds or Black-eared Cuckoos on the ground.

**Frank O'Connor**

#### ROBINS AT KALAMUNDA

With reference to the article "Robins: are they declining?" in WABN 76 (December 1995) the following observations may be of interest.

Since 1977 I have been monitoring the birds just outside the north-eastern area of Kalamunda National Park.

Each year there have always been a mature male and female Scarlet Robin occupying the area of 7 hectares of native bushland and orchard. These birds do not nest in this 7 hectares but each October/November they are seen feeding immature young.

Each year since 1981, varying from late March to early May, a male and female pair of Red-capped Robins arrives and stays between two to four weeks. In two separate years the newly arrived Red-capped Robins were vigorously attacked by the resident Scarlet Robins.

Observation in this small area of metropolitan bushland in the hills area have not indicated any decline in Scarlet Robin numbers over the last 20 years.

**Mary Bremner**

### CROSSWORD NO 5

#### CLUES DOWN

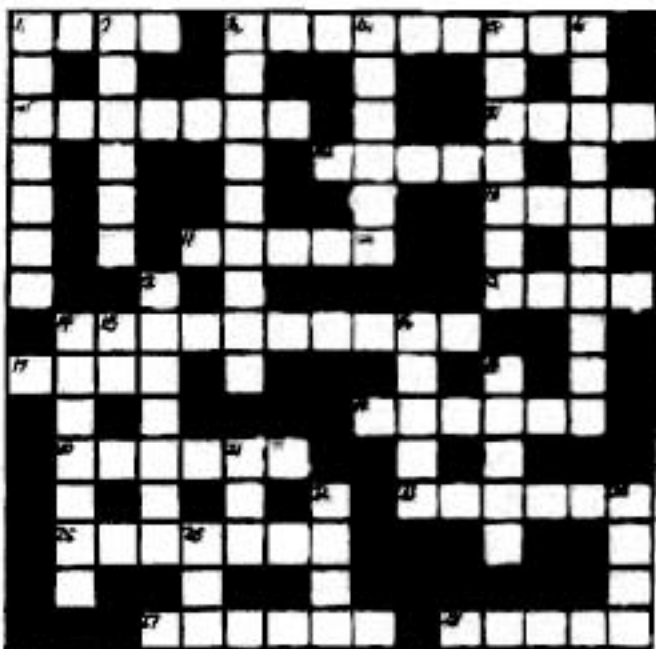
1. Shorebirds, often on open paddocks and bare plains
2. A set of eggs hatched at one time
3. Regular movement of birds from one place to another
4. A wader with an upturned bill
5. The act of performing to attract a mate
6. One species is still harvested regularly as a food source
7. Of prime importance for nesting if you are a parrot
8. Western Australia has one breeding species of this southern group
9. Masculine pronoun
10. The black cockatoos of Mount Lesueur have an unusual relationship with one

11. Small waders often seen in flocks at the edge of the water
12. Pouch which may contain the excreta of young birds
13. Destination of many of our migratory birds once they leave our shores
14. Pelagic birds may not see this for months at a time
15. Title of the scientific journal of the RAOU

#### CLUES ACROSS

1. A parasitic problem for most birds
2. The family group of mound-builders
3. The total of a bird's feathers
4. A Mistletoebird may well deposit one on a branch
5. Topographical feature east of Perth where different birds may be seen
6. Abbreviated name of an English bird introduced to the eastern States
7. Handsome waders with impressive pink legs
8. The normal time between successive moults in most birds
9. If you want a good one it is bound to cost you endless time and patience
10. Inlet south of Perth with the greatest abundance of wading birds in the southwest
11. Widespread diving bird with stiletto bill
12. A relative of the Australian White and Straw-necked Ibis
13. A Red-backed Kingfisher will create one as a nest entrance
14. Chief food source for Willy Wagtails
15. A rare visitor to southern Australian waters
16. Credited with many of Australia's early bird descriptions

Solution - see page 27.



## Country Groups

### ALBANY GROUP

Twenty one members met on Tuesday, 13th for our February outing at Morley Beach Nature Reserve at Denmark. A cool, cloudy day provided excellent viewing at the mouths of the Sleeman and Hay Rivers. Sightings included over 500 Black Swans, 300 Red-necked Avocets, 55 Yellow-billed Spoonbills and 55 White-fronted Chats. Forty three species were seen for the day. The March outing was to Waychinicup National Park.

### MANDURAH BIRD WATCHERS GROUP

#### Winter program 1996

June 8th – meet at 8 am at the corner Watson Drive and Pinjarra road, Barragup, to visit the Black Lake area.

July 13th – meet at 8 am at the corner of Oakleigh Drive and Old Coast Road to visit Erskine Conservation Park Nature Trail.

August 10th – meet at the corner of Yunderup and Pinjarra Roads, to visit the South Yunderup area.

September 14th – meet at 8 am at the Premier Hotel Pinjarra to visit the Whittakers Mill area. Those wishing to make an extended stay should bring lunch.

Contact Peter Bensted on 535-3594 or Frank Pridham on 535-4853

Bryan Barrett	(09) 457 2335
Sue Abbotts	(09) 444 1607

#### Trading Table:

Clive Nealon	(09) 448 5921
Rod Smith	(09) 397 5319
Brian Wilson	(09) 293 1094

#### Co-opted Office Bearers:

##### Librarian:

Helen Clark	(09) 387 6326
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##### Office/Building Manager:

Max Bailey	(09) 444 7920
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##### Publicity:

Judy Blyth	(09) 381 6293
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##### Guest Speaker Liaison:

Jeremy Talbot	(09) 291 6563
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##### Office Volunteer Liaison:

Wendy Napier	(09) 332 7265
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### NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined the RAOU WA Group between 25 January 1996 and 30 April 1996. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

G. Bevan, T. & G. Brennan, P. Burnett, D. & P. Free, A. Gadsby, C. Hassell, V. G. Hill, L. & S. L. Hogben, P. J. Knight, J. Mansell, D. McConville, G. Pearson, B. Power, R. Rismark, P. Stewart, B. Subotic, A. Sutherland-Maughan, T. Tarbotton, A. Todd, K. Verrier, E. Walker and M. Webster.

## Notices

### PERRY HOUSE

The WA Group Office of the RAOU is staffed by volunteers between 9.30 am and 12.30 pm every week day except public holidays.

There are many items of interest to members, such as the library, and visitors are welcome.

### WA GROUP COMMITTEE 1996

Following our AGM on 26 February, contact persons and contact numbers for the WA Group are as follows:

#### Chairman:

Clive Napier	69 Dean Rd, Bateman 6150 Tel (09) 332 7265
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#### Vice Chairman:

John Blyth	(09) 381 6293
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#### Secretary:

Margaret Philippon	Tel (09) 375 2068 Fax (09) 276 3149
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#### Treasurer:

Peter Anson	Tel/fax (09) 330 2915
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#### Committee:

##### Research and Conservation:

Mike Bamford	(09) 309 3671
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##### Excursions:

Bill McRoberts	(09) 459 1971
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### WESTERN BANDERS ASSOCIATION

Now in its second year, the Western Banders Association has a membership of 64, most of whom are members of the RAOU (WA Group). The WBA looks forward to another interesting year of cooperative banding activities which are aimed at solving some of the mysteries of our local birdlife.

Current projects at Albany and Yanchep have produced data on thousands of New Holland Honeyeaters. Those data are now being analysed. Age and sex characteristics of the Tawny-crowned Honeyeater and the Western Gerygone are also under investigation in two other projects. Both require the examination of many more of those species to identify features which would determine age and sex. Rufous Whistlers are also under scrutiny to determine movement and population dynamics and to confirm (or otherwise) the theory that males of the species have black or dark grey bills from an early age.

Some of the subjects of these studies get caught up with great enthusiasm. Dick Brown at Manjimup has been catching one particular Red-winged Fairy-wren almost every year for 17 years! At Eyre a Purple-gaped Honeyeater which was about 13 years old when last netted, had been caught 44 times.

If banding is of interest to you, your participation is welcomed. Contact Perry de Rebeira at (09) 298 8999.

### PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

The following reports/journals/books have been received February 1996 - April 1996:

Samson Park Draft Management Plan. Parks & Recreation Department, City of Fremantle. Nov 1995.

*Birds of the ACT. An Atlas.* McComas Taylor and Canberra Ornithologists Group. 1992.

*The Tattler.* Newsletter, Australasian Wader Studies Group. No 6, Feb 1996.

MacKay, Roy D. *The Birds of Port Moresby and District.* Thomas Nelson (Aust) Ltd. 1970.

*The Bird Observer.* Bird Observers Club of Australia. No 762, Feb 1996 and No 763, May 1996.

Serventy, D.L. and H.M. Whittell. *Birds of Western Australia.* UWA Press, Perth WA. 1976.

ACTA XX Congressus Internationale's Ornithologici. Proceedings from NZ Ornithological Congress, Christchurch, NZ. Dec 1990 (4 vols).

*Albatross.* Newsletter, Southern Oceans Seabird Study Association Inc. No 9, Jan 1996.

Newsletter, Australasian Seabird Group. No 29, Oct 1995.

*Wingspan.* Newsletter, RAOU. Vol 6 No 1, Mar 1996.

*Inquiry Into the Effects of Vessels on the Swan and Canning Rivers.* Swan River Trust Report No 26, 1995.

*Sustainable Development in the Rangelands of Western Australia — a Position Statement.* EPA, Perth WA. Jan 1996.

Newsletter, South Australian Ornithological Association Inc. No 153, Mar 1995.

Howard, Len. *Living with Birds.* Collins, London. 1956.\*

Dejose, John. *Australian Coastal Birds in Colour.* Reed Books, NSW. 1984.\*

Slater, Peter. *A Field Guide to Australian Birds.* Vols 1 & 2. Rigby, Adelaide. 1983.\*

Pringle, John Douglas. *National Photographic Index of Australian Wildlife. The Shorebirds of Australia.* Angus & Robertson. 1987.\*

Ardley, Neil. *Purnell's Find Out About Birds.* Purnell Books, London. 1983.\*

Hill, Robin. *Australian Birds.* Savvas Publishing, Adelaide. 1983.

Rauzon, Mark. *The Pictorial Encyclopedia of Birds of the World.* Gallery Books, New York. 1989.\*

Canning River Regional Park Draft Management Plan, 1995-2005. Dept of CALM.

RGC Wetlands Centre. Technical Report No 28. *Investigations into Improving Water Quality and Phytoplankton Growth in Lakes at Capel, WA.* Jan 1996.

*The Greener Times.* Conservation Council of WA Inc. Feb 1996.

*Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds.* Vol. 3, *Snipe to Pigeons.* Oxford University Press, Melbourne. 1996.

*Narpulungup News.* Newsletter, Fitzgerald River National Park Association. Mar 1996.

Newsletter, Northern NSW Group, RAOU. No 14, Feb 1996.

Report, RGC Wetlands Centre, Mar 1996.

*Western Banders News.* Newsletter, Western Banders Association. Feb 1996 and April 1996.

\* donated by Alan Robertson

Helen Clark, Librarian

## ARTWORK AND ARTISTS NEEDED

You will have noticed over the last five issues that original artwork by WA Group members has been featured in Bird Notes. We think that it helps to lift the appearance of our newsletter and would like to continue to run at least three or

four illustrations per issue. We would like to both spread the load and provide opportunities for their work to be presented to as many of our artistic members as possible. To this end, we would be pleased to have a list of people willing to offer black ink sketches for future issues.

Starting with this June 1996 issue of Bird Notes, the name of the contributor will be placed with the artwork along with a caption.

The illustrations should be of either birds or scenery associated with the Group's activities or related to particular stories in Bird Notes. Work should be original; that is based on your own sketches or photographs from the field or from a specimen, or done in a composite manner from a number of published photographs and drawings; it should not be simple copies of any published drawings or photographs.

If we have a list of artwork contributors we can either take illustrations offered and run them as needed in any issue or we can contact people to seek particular drawings to accompany specific stories. So, if you have any artistic skill and would like to help to maintain an attractive newsletter and give others the opportunity to enjoy your drawings, please let us know.

The Editors

## NOTE TO WABN CONTRIBUTORS

Please send **all** articles for publication in WABN to the office at Perry House by the deadline shown in the current issue.

Please ensure that the article is complete in terms of tables, maps, photographs or illustrations.

If you are typing your contribution, especially if you provide it to us on disk, it is even more helpful if you use the same format and conventions as those used in Bird Notes.

If you are writing a large article, or making several contributions, please contact the RAOU office to obtain a copy of the WABN style guide.

The Editors

## Observatory Reports

### EYRE BIRD OBSERVATORY

Phillip and I arrived at Eyre in October 1995 for the Bird Banding course, then spent a hectic two weeks induction with George and Rita (previous wardens). So far our time here proves to be a wonderful and challenging experience.

Recently Peter Sandilands led the Focus On Birds course. Some interesting birds were seen including Southern Whiteface, Varied Sittella, Red-capped Robin, Malleefowl and Collared Sparrowhawk.

The pleasant chirring of Rainbow Bee-eaters is often heard around the observatory now, with one flock of 78 flying over the house this morning.

The Nuytsland Nature Reserve in which the observatory is located was ravaged by bushfires in January, at one point coming only 2 km from our access track. The burnt areas are a wasteland with only blackened stumps of trees remaining and little birdlife excepting a few raptors preying on small animals exposed by the lack of cover. There have not been any

previous fires recorded in close proximity to the buildings in the Telegraph Station/Observatory's combined history. It will be interesting to see the bush regenerating and to monitor its recovery.

Going Batty On The Nullarbor with Doug Watkins was a most interesting course which ran in February. We all met some Chocolate Long Eared and White Striped Bats. It was great to see these furry flying mammals up close and learn about their lives. One Chocolate Wattle Bat (about the size of a mouse) was caught and released at the Observatory at 9 pm and was recaptured that same night – more than 35 km away!

Some more unusual birds have been recorded lately – Fork-tailed Swift, Ground Cuckoo-Shrike (nesting) and Shy Heathwren of special note. Eighty-six Banded Lapwings were also seen on the sewage ponds at Cocklebidy Roadhouse.

Our weekly 13 km beach count is always fun, too. Regulars include Red-capped Plovers, Pacific Gulls and various cormorants. Last week we watched a White-bellied Sea-Eagle and a Wedge-tailed Eagle fight it out in aerial battle. It was fantastic to watch two such powerful and majestic birds wheeling in the sky. Various waders including Red-necked Stints, Greenshanks, Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits and even a Hooded Plover have also been recorded.

Eyre is a special, tranquil place with a wild natural beauty all its own. Why not consider experiencing it for yourself? Courses which will run soon include Botany (21-27 July). Casual visitors are also welcome – please book in advance. Call (090) 39 3450 for more information.

**Joye Wilson and Phillip Sharples**  
Wardens

## **BROOME BIRD OBSERVATORY**

Seven days before the largest ever expedition by the Australasian Wader Study Group (AWSG) was due to begin at the Observatory, the new power system was installed by a team of men who had been working solidly for five days. Installed was a 'Remote Area Power System' also known as a solar/diesel hybrid power system which incorporates the latest in computer management technology. There are 27 solar panels on three self-tracking rigs, 30 large batteries, a 240-volt 3-phase inverter and backup diesel generator. This was all made possible by an 'Ecotourism Grant' from the Department of Tourism which was applied for by RAOU Headquarters on BBO's behalf. An enormous amount of work was done by BBO Committee and the project was designed and installed by Prime Power. Generous support was given by Western Power along with capital and in-kind contributions from BBO.

Twenty-four hour power is a major step forward for the Observatory and along with practical advantages such as running the office, cleaning and lighting, will make life a great deal more comfortable for visitors, with fans and the option of air-conditioned rooms. Until now many visitors have found the summer months too hot to contemplate, though lured by the large number of shorebirds.

Much will be written about the successes of the 1996 expedition, with over 8500 birds banded during the seven weeks and with such a large team almost all of the birds were fully processed. Although frustrated at being prevented by cyclone Kirstie from travelling to Eighty-Mile Beach, the team took the opportunity to do three catches of terns at the port in

Broome. It was during these catches that many birds were seen moving south down the coast and Common Noddy, Pomarine Skua, Arctic Skua and probably Glossy Swiftlet were recorded. The swiftlet record, which has gone to the Records Appraisal Committee (RAC), may have been the result of the cyclone system coming from the Cape York area of Queensland where they have been recorded in the past.

The AWSG visited Bush Point, at the southern end of Roebuck Bay, by hovercraft in March and April to record the large number of terns and huge number of shorebirds. This high tide roosting site is thought to be the single biggest roost on the whole of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, holding as many as 150 000 birds. It is the perfect roost as it is difficult for people to visit and there is an enormous food supply in the adjacent mud flats which extend as much as 12 km at low tide.

On 22 April, 1200 Little Terns were counted amongst the shorebirds, along with White-winged Black Terns in stunning full breeding plumage. Tony Tree, from South Africa, discovered six Black-naped Terns (a new record for our area) as we carefully identified and counted the masses of birds. There were 350 Pied Oystercatchers in March which increased to 535 on our return visit on 20 April. We hope to return in the middle of the year to see if there is a seasonal difference. During the March count, 850 Sanderlings were seen, of which we subsequently made a catch of 43 with a small cannon net in April.

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“... considered the 200 km/h head  
wind a little daunting.”

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The popular Wave the Waders Goodbye course this year was led by Danny Rogers, who works for the RAOU on the Handbook project. Danny had 13 keen participants slopping through mud collecting benthic samples, wading through Lake Eda investigating Magpie-Geese nests, counting flocks of migratory waders each evening and visiting the Arctic Tundra at night with magnificent slides. If Danny wasn't searching the sky and trees for birds he was usually found on his hands and knees 'frogging'. Many frog species were around following the good rains, a highlight being a Rocket Frog on Waterbank Station, which was well out of its known range.

Visible migration of shorebirds has been recorded during March and April for four years now and we thank the many people who helped each evening this year. Again the birds were delayed by stormy, cyclonic weather with no birds recorded leaving until 13 March after cyclone Kirstie. The Eastern Curlews that poured out of Broome after the cyclone must have considered the 200 km/h head wind a little daunting. Over 500 curlews were seen departing and a flock of 70 was a moving sight across the bay. They are usually the first waders seen to migrate north as they breed in northern China and Mongolia; however flocks were still leaving up until 27 April. Of interest was that during the last four years Black-tailed Godwits have been observed to begin departure between 13 and 15 April.

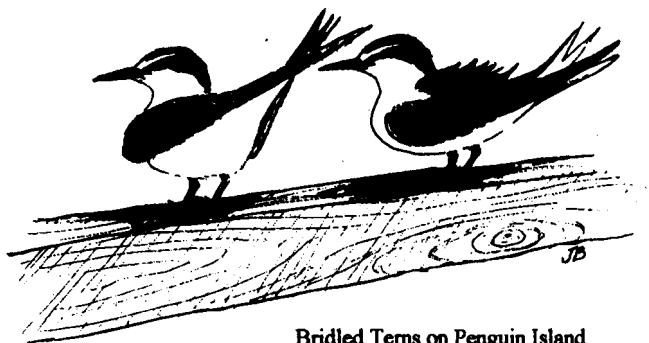
Many thanks to Mavis Russell who again looked after BBO as relief warden and was a great help during the expedition. We are extremely fortunate to have the services of Chris Hassell and Janet Sparrow and welcome them as Assistant

Wardens this year. Both are keen birdwatchers, have travelled widely and have amassed a wealth of local knowledge as members of the recent AWSG expedition.

**Jon Fallaw and Becky Hayward**

## Excursion Reports

### PENGUIN ISLAND, 10 February



Bridled Terns on Penguin Island  
by Judy Blyth

We started the day with a 2-hour boat cruise to the sand islands in Warnbro Sound, seeing huge numbers of Silver Gulls and Crested Terns, with many immatures present. Then on to the limestone islands in the Shoalwater Marine Park.

The sea lions were not in the least disturbed by our close presence, likewise the Pied and Sooty Oystercatchers or the single Whimbrel. What was disturbing to us were the huge numbers of Feral Pigeons — outnumbering all the other species seen and completely covering one of the rocky islands closer to Pt Peron.

We had lunch on Penguin Island and then began the search for Little Penguins — with nine sighted. Bridled Terns, incessantly chattering, were in huge numbers in and under every bush and often perched within touching distance. And, what many of us had waited for was the mid-afternoon arrival of a Buff-banded Rail, which emerged on schedule as the crowd thinned, to check out the lunch area for scraps.

Twenty-seven species in all were seen including a Nankeen Kestrel, Little Eagle and Singing Honeyeater.

A super day out for the 41 who had booked early.

Thank you, Clive (Napier), for your expertise and helpful approach — it was really appreciated.

**Yvonne Hocking**

### KALAMUNDA NATIONAL PARK, 14 February

It was a bright and sunny St. Valentine's Day when five people gathered for this midweek walk. The weather forecast of 39 degrees probably deterred a larger gathering; some may have preferred to wait at home for their flowers to arrive. In practice, a strong, cool easterly breeze made for delightful conditions although it clearly caused the birds to sit tight. (Surprisingly, there were no ants either on a track where they are normally common). There were hardly any bird calls and not too many birds to be seen. But we did at least see two male Golden Whistlers and a male and female Scarlet Robin, as well as several White-naped Honeyeaters. What must have been a Peregrine Falcon swooped across the sky with the wind

behind it. A few uncoloured and indeterminate Fairy-wrens flitted amongst the bushes. There was a cheer when we eventually sighted a pair of Australian Ringnecks. A small party of Weebills chased each other above our heads, accompanied by the Grey Fantails which are the commonest species in this National Park. Although the birding was disappointing (with only 13 species seen), caused possibly by the prolonged hot spell, it was a pleasant and cheerful walk.

**Brian Wilson**

### LAKE JOONDALUP, 18 February

Fourteen members met at Neil Hawkins Park for this Sunday morning walk. The weather was pleasantly cool, in contrast to the record-breaking heat of the previous fortnight.

We walked down to the shore where a somewhat dilapidated wooden jetty projects a short distance into the water. This jetty provides a good viewpoint of birds out on the lake and is also useful for looking back into the reeded shoreline for crakes, rails, etc. Good numbers of waterfowl were present, including Glossy Ibis, Buff-banded Rail and Egrets, both Great and Little.

On leaving the jetty we walked north along the nature trail



Red-winged Fairy-wrens at Broke Inlet  
by Jean Brooks



as far as the lookout. Although this lookout provides a nice panorama of the lake and environs it is probably too far from the water for good birdwatching. From here we went 'inland' a little way to look for bush birds. Birds were plentiful in this area and good views were had of a Little Eagle, both perched and in flight.

Back at the car park we did our bird list which showed that 58 species had so far been identified. Some of the group then proceeded to the southern end of the lake, off Ocean Reef Road. We had hoped to find some migratory waders here but did not see any. However, we did add two more species to our list, one being Great Cormorant, which is not common here, and the other Pink-eared Duck.

Thanks to the Excursions Sub-committee for arranging this morning's walk.

**Eric Banfield**

### **BROKE INLET WEEKEND, March 1-4**



Broke Inlet by Pam Agar

On Friday the 1st of March, Jan and I made prompt departures from our respective workplaces and high-tailed down to Broke Inlet with only a short petrol stop on the way.

We arrived at Claire House at 7 pm and, to our surprise, were met with a chorus of 'where have you been?' from a group of early campers. In fact, a third of the 32 participants in the weekend camp had arrived during the Friday.

This enthusiasm was typical of the group throughout the whole camp, with a high degree of endeavour being applied to the task of finding birds in the perennially difficult Karri/Marri forest region. A high water level in the inlet did not help with our outings as there was very little beach, and it was often necessary to trek through the fringing vegetation when exploring the inlet.

As well as Perth people going south to escape the heat and the Federal Election hype, a healthy contingent of members from Albany helped to swell our numbers.

Saturday morning was spent in individual exploration by early arrivals, with an organised trek along the inlet shore to the west in the afternoon. As we returned to camp at about 5pm there was a stiff breeze blowing, with some pretty chilly drizzle to remind us of our location.

A bright start on Sunday, despite the lack of sleep for

those who slept in the house (due to the mice, rats or perhaps others in the roof) saw 20 of our number set off at 7.30 am for a trek along the inlet to the east. Quite apart from bird spotting, this walk was fascinating for the vegetation and terrain that we encountered. After lunching at Signal Point, we returned to camp at mid-day for an afternoon of freelance spotting in the forest, campsite or shore as folk pleased.

On both Saturday and Sunday evenings a stalwart band of campers ignored weary bodies, and went spotlighting. On the first night a Southern Boobook and a Tawny Frogmouth were seen by all. On the Sunday night we saw one and possibly two adult Southern Boobooks plus a juvenile, and enjoyed their company for close to half an hour.

As the weekend progressed, individual groups of spotters commented on the low numbers of birds being sighted; however, when the first bird list was compiled on the Saturday night, we had a total of 56 different species. Although low bird numbers were sighted, each group was seeing different species.

The list reached 77 by the end of Sunday and further keen spotting on Monday yielded a White-bellied Sea Eagle, Red-winged Fairy-wren, Australian Hobby and Black-fronted Dotterel. This brought to nine the number of raptors sighted, and a weekend total of 81 species. As wader numbers were quite low due to the high water level, the camp was considered to be a great success. When Barbara Hart chose a high 72 species as the camp total for the wine bottle quiz, there was some humour displayed. Well done Barbara, you had the last laugh!

Claire House was an excellent base for a campout, especially with such a large group of enthusiastic birders to cater for. Participants in the campout wish to express their thanks to the owners of the property for making the event possible.

**Jan and Dave Crossley**

### **GARDEN ISLAND, 31 March**

At 8.30 am on 31 March, the maximum 25 people permitted on this visit gathered in the car park at the beginning of the causeway leading onto HMAS STIRLING. We were met here by Boyd Wykes, the Environmental Manager for Garden Island — he was to be our guide for the day.

After a brief history of the island and the Navy's role on it, we followed him onto the island itself, parking near the submarine base. From here we followed a track through the bush to begin our birding. Unfortunately the birds were unusually quiet and had obviously decided to 'lay low' due to the steadily increasing heat of the day. Boyd made up for this by informative stops to point out various plants and native island vegetation.

A welcome paddle in the sea for our lunch-break on the beach on the western side of the island brought sightings of a few waders amongst the Crested Terns and inevitable Silver Gulls; namely, a lone Grey Plover, Red-capped Plovers, Sanderlings and Ruddy Turnstones. Three dolphins also came in close to shore before heading off on their way.

After lunch we went to the north of the island, with a sighting of a Brush Bronzewing on the track, then up to the cliffs and beautiful sheltered bays (oh for my bathers!). We saw an Osprey's nest atop a rocky outcrop in one of the bays, and a pair of Ospreys on the beach nearby. A rather surprising



highlight here was the sighting of a pair of Australian Wood Ducks which Max kept informing us hadn't been recorded on the island since 1921!

A few Tammar wallabies were seen in the undergrowth on the walk back to the cars and approximately 60 Banded Lapwings on the playing ovals as we headed back off the island. A total of 33 species for the day was a little disappointing but a big thank you still to Boyd for allowing us his time and for an interesting and informative excursion.

Jack Warner

#### EASTER CAMPOUT IN LAKE KING AREA, 4-8 April



Lake Hurlstone Nature Reserve  
by Pam Agar

A total of 34 people took part in five very full days of bird watching and spotlighting, yielding a total species count for the five days of 82 species. Pam Agar was a worthy winner of our competition to guess the campout total and has provided the two lovely drawings of scenery from the trip.

Our camp was in regrowth mallee around a large gravel pit in the Lake Gulson Timber Reserve, a 4000 hectares reserve, with a mixture of salt lake and granite rock complexes, Gimlet and Salmon Gum woodlands, and mixed-species mallee of varying ages since fire. Fairly thorough searching throughout our time there yielded a total of 66 species for the reserve, including Shy Hylacola, Southern Whiteface, and abundant Purple-gaped Honeyeaters, Redthroats and Southern Scrub-robins. With the exception of Wedge-tailed Eagles birds of prey were rather scarce, but a total of six species were seen, including Spotted Harrier and Peregrine Falcon.

We visited six other reserves, from Palarup and Lake King Nature Reserves in the south to Lake Hurlstone Nature Reserve towards the northern end of the chain of lakes. Lake Hurlstone and Lake Varley Nature Reserves (the latter between Lakes Gulson and Hurlstone) were, like our camp reserve, large and varied and supported a wide range of bush birds, many of them common and also seen at Lake Gulson.

In addition to the day trips to selected reserves, six or seven vehicles went out spotlighting on each of three nights, armed with three or four people and two spotlights. While our list of night birds did not include Night Parrots (several unconfirmed reports of which were the initial catalyst for the campout), we did see Boobook and Barn Owls, Spotted and Australian Owlet Nightjars and Tawny Frogmouths. Add to this a record of the calls of Bush Thick-knee near our camp site and it was a fairly full list of night birds. Unfortunately,

most spotlighting teams saw as many foxes as birds, as well as many rabbits and the occasional cat!

One of the most lasting memories for Judy and me came on the Thursday after Easter, following heavy rain brought by the tail end of Cyclone Olivia. As the rain eased, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Fork-tailed Swifts seemed to be everywhere above our heads, speeding and wheeling across the still stormy sky, back-lit by the setting sun.

Many thanks to Mal Graham of CALM Katanning for helping with organising and setting up the camp, and to the friendly people of Varley for making us welcome and publicising our presence in local news sheets.

Night Parrots next time?

John Blyth



Granite Outcrop on Lake Gulson Reserve  
by Pam Agar

#### STONEY BROOK, 17 April

Clouds were blotting out the sun and a chilly easterly wind was blowing as 15 people met to start the walk. The weather seemed to affect the birds, for in the early stages we saw or heard very few of them. As we descended into lower parts where it was more sheltered, they began to be more visible. Later, the clouds dispersed and the warm sunshine seemed to motivate the birds to greater activity, but even so, our total count of 27 species was not as high as it could have been, as it is a place with a good bird list.

White-breasted Robins, often seen or at least heard here, did not appear, but we did have good sightings of Western Yellow and Scarlet Robins. Also seen were Golden Whistlers, Western Rosellas, Red-capped Parrots and fleeting glimpses of Splendid Fairy-wrens. A sighting of Red-winged Fairy-wrens a few days previously was a welcome sign that the wrens, which seemed to have gone missing since a fire burnt part of the valley 15 months ago, have returned to the creek area as it has revegetated.

Mavis Norgard

#### WHITE WELLS STATION 25 - 28 April

Members who were unable to attend this campout missed a treat. Thirty seven people enjoyed the activities, which were enhanced by perfect weather.

The 190 000 hectares of White Wells Station (between Wubin and Paynes Find) provided a varied bird habitat. A mud map produced by Margery Clegg assisted participants to find their way to the heathland, eucalypt woodland, granite

outcrops, soaks, dams and breakaway country.

Early morning birding was on an informal basis and, for those interested an organised outing began at 9am Friday. Clive Napier organised several simultaneous small groups which went off in various directions. Later in the day, groups swapped birding spots. This prevented groups becoming too large and enabled people to see more birds.

We were fortunate to see a Malleefowl nest alongside a track; it appeared to have been used within the last year or so. Much to the delight of a later group visiting the same nest three Malleefowl were in the locality – they paraded very professionally allowing spectators to see all aspects of their plumage.

One of the highlights was the night spotlighting enabling many people to have multiple views of Australian Owlet-nightjars and Tawny Frogmouths. These two species were among seven new species seen, raising the recorded number for the station to one hundred and four. The other new species seen were Black-breasted Buzzard, Varied Sitellas, Hoary-headed Grebe, White-backed Woodswallow and Spotted Nightjar. The last mentioned was flushed out of heathland during a morning excursion on Friday and again flushed out at the same spot on Saturday.

Not daunted by a further journey of approximately 120 km on the Saturday, an intrepid band drove to Paynes Find and then along the Sandstone road to the Warne River. They were rewarded by excellent views of Gilbert's Whistlers, male and female, who also serenaded beautifully. Other sightings were Chiming Wedgebill, Golden Whistler, Crested Bellbird, Mulga Parrot, Brown Songlark, Zebra Finches, and Southern Whiteface. Mistletoebirds were easily seen enjoying a habitat containing four species of mistletoe.

The total number of species seen on the campout was seventy six.

Many thanks to Clive Napier for the excellent organisation, and to Bruce of White Wells Station for maintaining the much appreciated camping facilities.

Marion Watson

## Coming Events

### **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 nibbles and water to tide yourself over. You should be rewarded by a good mix of waterbirds and bushbirds.

Leaders: John and Judy Blyth

### **Wednesday 12 June – Mid-week Walk at Burswood Open Spaces**

Meet at 8:30am outside the Park Board Administration Building. Parking is available about 100 metres to the left and right of the building. We last visited Burswood in March of last year, and we'll be looking at the bird life which has

returned to the public parks and gardens which occupy the site of the former Rivervale Dump.

Leader: Jenny Marsland

### **Sunday 16 June – Half-day Walk at the Spectacles**

Meet in the main carpark on McLaughlan Road at 9 am. Proceed along the Kwinana Freeway to the Anketell cross road, some 30 km south of Perth. Turn right into Anketell Road, travel about 2 km, then turn left into McLaughlan Road.

John Day of Alcoa will meet us and explain the plans the company has for the area.

It's a nice place for lunch so bring some food!

Leaders: Allan and Rose Jones

### **Sunday 23 June – Half-day Walk at Perth Zoo**

Meet at 8:30am outside the main entrance to the Zoo. Neil Hamilton, who has been in charge of the breeding program for white-tailed and red-tailed black cockatoos, will meet us and take us into the grounds (be prepared to pay a small fee). Neil will then explain what he does and show us his birds.

### **Monday 24 June Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Jersey St, Wembley, 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.

♦♦♦ See the following map for the new venue ♦♦♦  
♦♦♦ for this and future general meetings ♦♦♦

### **Saturday 29 June – Full-day Excursion at Wambyn Nature Reserve**

Meet at 9 am at the junction of York Road and Great Eastern Highway (i.e. "The Lakes" service station). The reserve is approximately 35 km beyond the junction. It has good stands of Wandoo and breakaways, etc. where birding could be interesting. We last visited in 1991.

Leader: John Ashford

### **Saturday 6 July – Half-day Walk at Lake Coogee**

Meet at 8:30am on the southern side of Mayor Road, Munster (50 m west of Hamilton Road).

This is quite a diverse area, with over 80 species having been seen on the lake and in surrounding bushland. Nine species of raptors have been sighted.

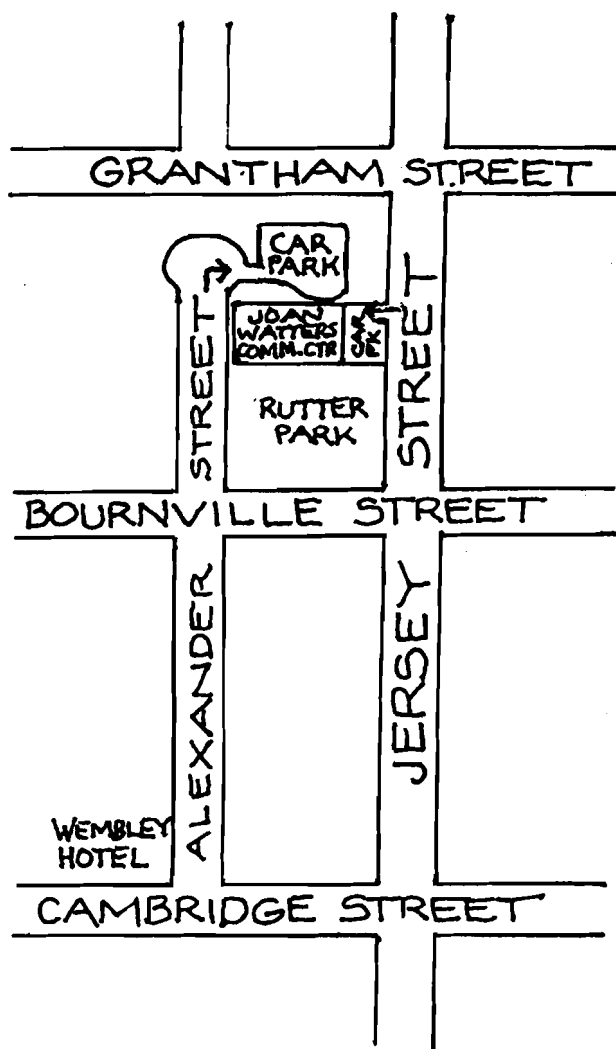
Leaders: Jan and Dave Crossley

### **Sunday 14 July – Half-day Walk at Lake Monger**

Meet at 9am at the most-westerly carpark 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: Sue Abbotts



### Venue for future monthly meetings

#### Wednesday 17 July – Mid-week Walk at Star Swamp, North Beach

Meet at 9am at the Hope Street entrance.

Star Swamp has Tuart woodland, mixed-Banksia woodland, and heath. The RAOU has not visited for some time.

Leader: Vera Paterson

#### Saturday 20 July – Half-day Excursion at North Mole, Fremantle

Meet at 8:00am. We aim to spend a couple of hours looking for seabirds. Don't forget your telescope.

Leader: K.C. Lim

#### Monday 22 July Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Jersey St, Wembley, 8.00 pm

Chris Surman, a postgraduate student at Murdoch University, will discuss the foraging ecology of the seabirds of the southern islands of the Abrolhos group. Birds discussed will include Common and Lesser Noddies, Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Sooty Terns.

#### Saturday 27 July – Full-day Special Excursion to Yanchep National Park

The WA group of the RAOU organises a wide range of bird walks and campouts each year. This excursion is for anyone interested in learning to assist with the many aspects involved in planning and executing these outings.

Experienced leaders will be on hand. Not only will the day be instructive, but there will be good birding as well. All members are, of course, welcome to attend.

Turn left off Yanchep Road into Pipidinnny Road, Eglinton (an hour's drive from Perth). We will meet at 8:30 am at the end of Pipidinnny Road (approx. 5 km from the turnoff). Be prepared to pay a small fee to enter the picnic area for lunch.

We'll look at four habitats during the day: the coastal dunes for Variegated Fairy-wrens, White-browed Scrubwrens, etc.; the heath for White-winged Fairy-wrens, Tawny-crowned, and White-cheeked Honeyeaters; the swamp for waterfowl, and a part of Yanchep National Park which few people visit.

Please put your name on the list in the RAOU office, or contact Bryan Barrett (457-2335), Bill McRoberts (459-1971), or Clive Napier (332-7265).

A planning meeting for those interested will be held at Perry House on Friday, July 26th, at 7pm.

Leader: Clive Napier

#### Sunday 4 August – Full Day Excursion at Christmas Tree Well

Meet at 9 am at the Christmas Tree Well carpark on the Brookton Highway - watch for RAOU signs. This area has not been visited by the RAOU for many years. The reserve is 45 km from the beginning of the Brookton Highway.

Leader: Bryan Barrett

#### Saturday 10 August – Half-day Excursion at Big Carine Lake

Meet at 8:30am in the carpark off Beach Road, Carine. Sixty-plus species have been recorded here, including the 3 ibis, 8 species of duck, the Buff-Banded Rail, and several raptors. Don't forget to bring your telescope.

Leader: Clive Nealon

#### Saturday 10 August to Sunday 11 August – Campout and Malleefowl Search, Dalwallinu

A search for Malleefowl mounds is planned for Nugadong Reserve near Dalwallinu. This large wheatbelt reserve supports many bird species, including those associated with the not-too-distant arid zone, so the outlook for bird observations is encouraging. Malleefowl are frequently seen there; this will be the time that their mounds will be well under way.

Camping space is available at the shearing shed on Gordon McNeill's property 10 km east of the Great Northern Hwy on Nugadong East Road. Electricity, water and shelter are available but facilities are otherwise limited.

This will become one of the regular monitoring sites in WA. The Malleefowl project is a significant RAOU project and is an integral part of the National Recovery Plan. There will be general birding opportunities, and this is a new reserve for us, so please come along and help make it a successful weekend.

Contact Rod Smith on (09) 397 5319 if you are attending so that suitable arrangements may be made.

#### **Thursday 15 August – Mid-week Excursion at Bibra Lake**

Meet in main carpark off Bibra Drive at 8:30am. This is a good area for both bushbirds and waterbirds.

Leader: Peter Anson

#### **Saturday 17 August – Full-day Bird Survey at Talbot Brook**

We have arranged bus transportation to this private property. The bus will leave Perth No 4 Carpark at 8:30am, with a second stop at Midland Junction Station Carpark at 9am. Ring Clive Napier (332-7265) before Saturday, August 10th, if you wish to travel by bus. Seating is limited and cost of a bus ticket is \$10.00 per person.

If you wish to travel privately, take the Great Southern Highway. Turn right into Cut-Hill Road (before reaching York). Turn right into Talbot Road, and travel about 10 km. Then turn left into Talbot Hall Road. Continue about 2 km to Talbot Hall. We will meet here at 10 am.

The property we are to visit is located near map reference points A4, Map 63, The West Australian Traveller's Atlas, Edition 1, 1994.

Leader: Clive Napier

#### **Sunday 18 August – Full-day Pelagic Seabird Trip**

Meet at Hillary's Boat Harbour at 6:30 am. The 60 ft "Blue Water" will leave at 7am, and return at 4 pm (approximate times). We need a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 18 people. The cost for 14 people will be \$80 each; for 18 people the cost will be \$60 per person. Cost for numbers in between is in \$5 increments.

This is a rare treat for RAOU members, and at least 10 people have already indicated their interest. Therefore, you are advised to book as soon as possible by phoning Frank O'Connor on 386-5694 or 482-1445.

Leader: Frank O'Connor

#### **Friday 23 August to Wednesday 27 August – Mullewa Campout**

Members may want to attend all or part of this campout. There will be daily organised tours to a wide variety of habitats in this interesting area on the mulga/eucalypt transition zone.

Places to visit will include Tallering Peak and gorges, Coalseam Park, and East Yuna Nature Reserve. We will also examine land revegetation projects on farms, railway and roadside corridors and survey birds present.

Of the 150 species recorded in the area we should see Malleefowl, Australian Bustard, Inland Dotterel, Mulga and Bourke's Parrot, Grey Honeyeater and Chestnut Quail-thrush.

We will also be visiting Mullewa at the time of the year when wildflowers are at their best. The Mullewa Wildflower Exhibition is being held during our visit and we will have a display of birds of the area. Members are asked to indicate if they are prepared to help at the display on one day of the visit.

Tentative accommodation arrangements have been made for our visit. Ring or write as soon as possible giving the

following details: Name; number attending; date of arrival/leaving (accommodation available from Thursday 22nd); type of accommodation; if volunteer for display.

Further enquiries to Allan Jones (09) 364 3975 or Bill McRoberts (09) 459 1971

#### **Monday 26 August Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 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.

#### **Sunday 1 September – Half-day Walk at Bennett Brook**

Meet at 8am at the southern end of Valley Brook Road, off Benara Road, Caversham. Ninety-one species, including 19 breeding species, have been recorded here. We have a 46% chance of seeing a flock of 250 Little Corellas.

Leader: Ron Van Delft

#### **Sunday 8 September – Spring Fling, Perry House/Bold Park**

The Wildflower Society is holding its annual wildflower display at Perry House on Sunday 8 September. This very popular and well attended event runs from 9 am to 4 pm. We participate by guiding bird walks around Bold Park and by mounting a display of local birds and setting up our stall for the sale of cards and books.

Our walks and stall have always been well patronised and we will need about a dozen volunteers to help during the day. If you can take part, please notify Peter Anson or leave your name at the office.

#### **Sunday 15 September – Full-day Walk from Nanga Bridge along the Murray River**

Meet at 8:30am at the Dwellingup Hotel. From Perth, drive down the Southwest Highway to North Dandalup. Turn left to Dwellingup. Allow one hour of driving time from Armadale (about 70 km one-way).

This will be a 12 km undulating walk down a creek and along the Murray River. We'll follow a good track through Jarrah, Marri, and Banksia, with beautiful views of the river.

Bushbirds seen in this area include Striated and Spotted Pardalotes, Red-eared Firetail, Red-winged Fairy-wren, White-breasted Robin, and Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo.

Bring lunch and a minimum of 1 litre of water per person. I'll boil a billy at lunch time for everyone.

Leader: Sue Abbotts (444-1607)

#### **Wednesday 18 September – Mid-week Walk at Canning River Regional Park, Wilson**

Meet at 8:30 at the Kent Street Weir Carpark, near the Canning River, to explore the varied bird life of the Canning wetlands.

Leader: Clive Napier

### Sunday 22 September – Full-day Excursion at Boyagin Rock Nature Reserve

A bus with 22 seats will leave Perth Number 4 Carpark at 7:30am, with a second stop at Woolworth's carpark in Kelmscott at 7:50 am. Aim to return to Perth by 6 pm. The cost of a bus ticket is \$12 per person. Ring Clive Napier (332-7265) by September 15th to reserve a seat.

For those wishing to travel privately, either make your own way to Boyagin Rock or join a convoy, which will meet at 8:15am at the corner of Canning Mills Road and Brookton Highway, Karragullen. The round trip to the Rock is about 250 km.

This reserve (Western Australian Traveller's Atlas map reference C4, map 55) contains impressive stands of powderbark wandoo and has a species list of about 73 birds. There are moderate to easy walks, with some more strenuous around the Rock.

Leaders: Bill McRoberts and Clive Napier

### Monday 23 September Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley, 8.00 pm

Tens of thousands of Banded Stilts nested at Lake Ballard near Menzies following cyclonic rain early in 1995. Jim Lane of CALM will describe this memorable breeding event and what it has added to our knowledge of this unusual wader species.

### Saturday 29 September - Monday 30 September: Birdwatching Campout at Dryandra State Forest

Two cottages have been reserved at Dryandra State Forest near Narrogin (2 1/2 hours ex Perth), at a cost of \$10 per person per night. Sorry, no camping.

Bring your own food and sleeping bag. Crockery, cutlery, and cooking utensils are provided. There are barbecues as well. Please phone Bryan Barrett on 457-2335 to book your place.

One hundred and six species of birds have been seen in the reserve, including Blue-breasted Fairy-wrens, Western Yellow Robins, Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, and Restless Flycatchers. Dryandra is a great place for night spotting, so bring a good torch and car spotlight if you have one.

Leaders: Bryan Barrett and Helen Clark (assisting)

### Tuesday 1 October Special Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley 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 – Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley 8.00 pm

Professor Gordon Maclean, the current editor of Roberts' Birds of Southern Africa (the leading textbook of the birds of the subcontinent for over 50 years) and the President of the Southern African Ornithological Society, will speak to us about

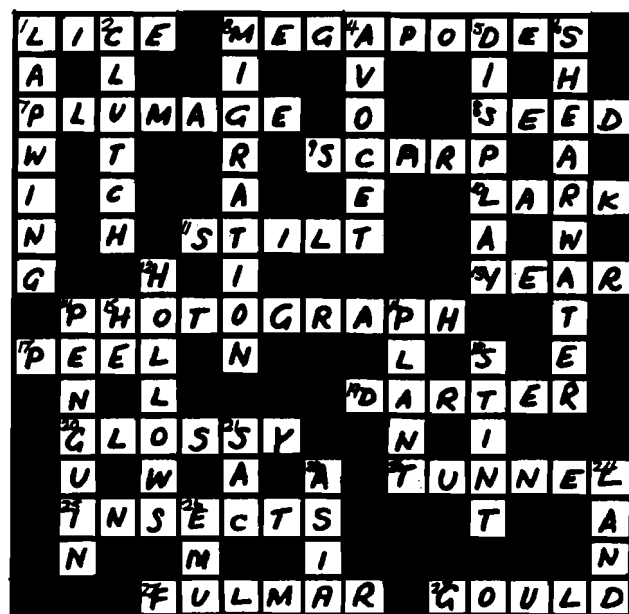
the endemic birds of South Africa.

### Monday 25 November Meeting – Joan Watters Community Centre, Wembley 8.00 pm

Perry de Rebeira and several other members of the Western Banders Association will describe their banding studies of our birdlife.

### NO DECEMBER EVENING MEETING

### CROSSWORD SOLUTION



Make a photocopy of the list of Group  
Committee members on page 18 and  
keep it by your telephone – they would  
like to hear from you!



## FALCON TOURS

# 1997

## KENYA 21 DAYS OF BIRDING & GAME VIEWING

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**23 Jan. to 13 Feb. (22 days total) Fully accomodated**

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**26 April to 17 May and 13 July to 2 August Camping 21 days (3 x 4WD convoy)**

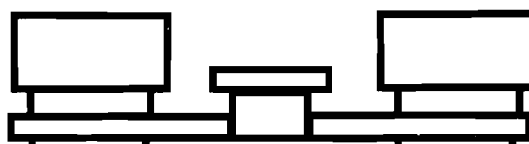
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