

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of Birds Australia WA
(Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union)

No 80 December 1996

LITTLE PENGUINS ON PENGUIN ISLAND

One of the WA Group's newest members, Dr Belinda Cannell of Biological Sciences at Murdoch University, is conducting a detailed study of Little Penguins at Penguin Island, and is seeking interested (and trainable) volunteers to help radio-track some of the birds. Belinda has provided the following story for Bird Notes, and can be contacted by prospective volunteers on 09 360 2202 (bus hours) and 09 272 4079 (after hours). Please contact her and help with this fascinating work; Eds.

STUDY ON LITTLE PENGUINS

The Little Penguin *Eudyptula minor* colony on Penguin Island is the only one of significant size on the west coast of Australia, and is estimated to have a current population of about 1000-1200. It is a long-established colony but is very isolated; the nearest colonies of any size are more than 1500 km away. Little Penguins do not breed on the Western Australian mainland and their absence from many islands around Perth (e.g. Rottnest Island) implies that, as well as breeding sites free from predators and disturbance, they require additional resources available only on or near Penguin, Garden and Carnac Islands. The most probable requirement is access to a reliable, year-round supply of small, schooling fish within 5-10 km of their breeding colony.

Evidence from penguin populations throughout Australia indicates that their numbers are declining, particularly those populations close to expanding urban areas. The colony on Penguin Island is only 600 m offshore from the suburbs of Rockingham and thus is the closest WA penguin colony to areas of high density urban development. Growing demand for recreational and commercial access to coastal venues will obviously continue to place pressure upon the small, isolated and unusual penguin colony on Penguin Island. In addition:

- the human population of Rockingham has doubled over the last five years and is projected to treble in size over

the next 20 years;

- the number of recreational boats registered in Western Australia rose from 20 000 in 1970, to 40 000 in 1980 and 70 000 in 1990;
- trawl and beach seine fisheries operate in and around the Marine Park.

The penguins on Penguin Island have been studied by Murdoch University researchers since 1984. In 1986, 55 nesting boxes were placed in areas with different levels of human disturbance. These boxes have been visited weekly since their placement, allowing the collection of information on the condition of the penguins throughout the year, how often they return to nest-boxes, when they breed, how successfully they breed, and in a limited fashion, their diet. However, it is not known where the penguins feed, when they feed, nor whether these habits change throughout the year. Visual tracking of penguins at sea is very difficult and satellite tracking is prohibitively expensive; at present radio-tracking is the best way to determine their foraging patterns.

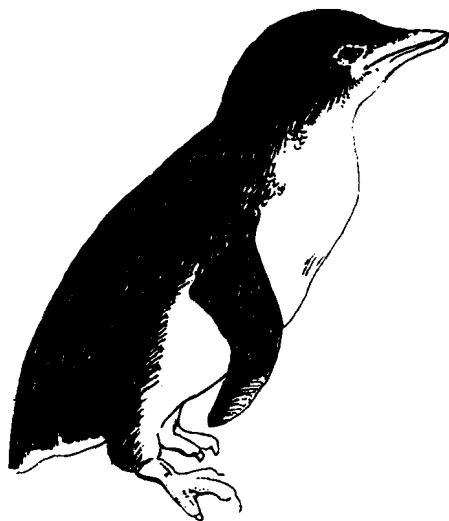
We have joined forces with a local community group — the Friends of Shoalwater Islands Marine Park (FSIMP), and together obtained a grant from the Gordon Reid Foundation for Conservation. Murdoch University has obtained extra funding from Port Kennedy Resorts Pty Ltd. These funds are also to be used to gather information on the diet of the penguins throughout the year, as well as the location, abundance and size distribution of the prey species (or bait fish) taken by Little Penguins in the project area.

Anyone who has done any radio-tracking will agree that it is a very costly exercise, both in monetary terms and the number of hours over which the animals must be tracked, and hence the large number of personnel required. We will be attaching temporary lightweight and streamlined transmitters on ten birds and tracking them concurrently from three sites over a 10-day period. The tracking sessions will occur at four

different stages in the annual breeding cycle of the penguins, repeated for three years. As the penguins leave the island before dawn and return after dusk, each tracking station will be operated from 6:00 am until 6:00 pm (the times will vary according to season) and each bird will be tracked every ½-1 hour. Two people are needed at each station for a period of approximately three hours. A person will not be required to do more than one shift a day, and ideally, we would like to use the same people over a series of days. However, this is not an absolute requirement. Volunteers have currently been recruited from FSIMP, the CALM volunteer group, and a few from Underwater World, but **many more people are desperately needed.**

Hopefully at the end of this three-year project, we will have determined where the Little Penguins from Penguin Island feed, how these locations are affected by their breeding cycle, what they eat, and the location and abundance of their prey at different times of the year. Such information, of course, will help us to determine any impacts that developments in the area are likely to have on this very special population of penguins.

Belinda Cannell



Little Penguin
Drawn: Val Talbot

NEW MEMBERS

The following people joined the RAOU (WA Group) between 1 August and 25 October 1996. We look forward to meeting you at our excursions and general meetings.

Central South Naturalist Club (Secretary), G Assan, B Cannell, S and B Carmody, M Dorn, R N Galbraith, I Gale, G and J Graham, A Hall, P and A Milberry, B Millen, P Peters, B Phillips, J Sherry, R Teale.

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.

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 *actually seen* and reasons for the identification. Note that a statement to the effect that what was seen fitted a description in a field guide is a statement about what is in a field guide, and does not tell the editors what you actually saw. Providing extra details also assists the editors to provide extra information to readers.

Interesting reports this time include a Little Curlew in the south-west, two Arctic Terns at Fremantle (details next issue), further reports of Little Terns breeding, a Little Ringed Plover near Broome and a Pied Imperial Pigeon in Broome. Also sent in were some exciting seabird records from a pelagic trip out of Broome, including Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel, Bulwer's Petrel, and possible Jouanin's Petrel - these are not recorded below but details will be in the next issue.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Malleefowl - 1, 28/7/96, reserve No. 16491, 2.4 km NE of Canna Siding on Canna North-East Road, ca 40 km N of Morawa (Morawa) - BL * 1, 2/9/96, 6.6 km S of Burakin-Kulja road on road to Koorda (Koorda) - BL, TL

Great Crested Grebe - 38, 25/10/96, Lake Coogee (Cockburn) - JC, DC

Kerguelen Petrel - 11, 18/8/96, ca. 45 km W of Perth - PPT * 100+ on various occasions, 6/96 and 7/96, with 150+ over 7 hours on 16/7/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Great-winged Petrel - present 5/96 to early 6/96, with highest number 30+ on 25/5/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 30, 14/9/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP, FO

White-headed Petrel - 30 over 6-7 hours, 8/5/96 and 16/7/96, with smaller numbers on many other days, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (large number for this species)

Soft-plumaged Petrel - 17, 18/6/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 12, 18/8/96, ca. 45 km W of Perth - PPT

White-chinned Petrel - small numbers 5/96 to 7/96, with up to 15+ on several days in 7/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 13, 14/9/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP, FO

Grey Petrel - small numbers, 5/96 to 7/96, with 15+ on 17/5/96, 2/6/96, 3/6/96 and 11/6/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (generally uncommon visitor to the south-west coast)

Streaked Shearwater - 2, 8/5/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP (southernmost WA record)

Fluttering/Hutton's Shearwater - 15+ over 7 hours, 16/7/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP * 35

(Hutton's), 18/8/96, ca. 45 km W of Perth - PPT * 60, 15/9/96, Bunker Bay, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - FO (some birds can be confidently identified to species in the field, but many are difficult even in the hand)

Little Shearwater - 2, 15/9/96, Bunker Bay, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - FO * 2, 18/9/96, Cape Leeuwen (Augusta-Margaret River) - FO

Shy Albatross - 1, 18/8/96, ca. 45 km W of Perth - PPT * 3, 14/9/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP, FO * 1, 27/9/96, ca. 20 km W of Dongara - MC (long way N for this species)

Wilson's Storm-Petrel - 1, 6/96, ca. 50 m offshore, near James Street jetty, Esperance (Esperance) - Joan McIlroy per KD

Australasian Gannet - varying numbers between 1/5 and mid-July, with highest (150+) on 17 and 18/6/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Little Curlew - 1, 20/10/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - SN, RD and 14 UK birdwatchers (rare visitor to the south-west)

Terek Sandpiper - 1, 16/9/96, Gnarabup Beach, Margaret River (Augusta-Margaret River) - FO (not often recorded in the far south-west)

Red-necked Phalarope - 1 female, 17/10/96, Government House Lake, Rottneest Island - AB * 1, 21-25/10/96, Pearse Lake, Rottneest Island - KM, BM * female in breeding plumage, Government House Lake, Rottneest - RL

Banded Stilt - ca. 10000+, 29/9/96, Yarra Yarra Lakes NR (Three Springs) - BN * 7000, 20/10/96, south of Austin Bay, Peel Inlet (Murray) - JB, JuB

Lesser Sand Plover - 2, 29/9/96, with ca. 60 Red-capped Plovers and ca. 30 Red-necked Stints, Yarra Yarra Lakes NR (Three Springs) - BN

Hooded Plover - 2, 12/5/96 and 27/5/96, Gull Rock, Cape Naturaliste (Busselton) - RP * 1 adult, 16/9/96, Flinders Bay, Augusta (Augusta-Margaret River) - FO * 2 adults, 18/8/96, Hamelin Bay (N of Augusta) (Augusta-Margaret River) - FO

Arctic Tern - 2, 5/8/96, South Mole, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS, BW (description and photos taken; article being prepared for next issue of WABN)

Bridled Tern - 1 young, 8/95, exhausted, on grass near beach, Esperance townsite (Esperance) - Joan McIlroy per KD (a long way south and east for this species and at an unusual time of year)

White-winged Black Tern - 16-18, 1/9/96, Alfred Cove (Melville) - BBa, MCI

Short-billed Black-Cockatoo - a "flock", 4/9/96, 30 km N of Wubin (Dalwallinu) - MB

Sacred Kingfisher - 1, 25/5/96 and 17/8/96, Beaconsfield (Fremantle) - IS * 1, 18/8/96 and 25/8/96, South Mole, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS (overwintering birds, possibly from further south)

Probable escapees: Eastern Rosella - 1, 15/4/96 and 22/4/96, Belmont (Belmont) - IS * **Canary** - 1, 21/1/96, Doubleview (Stirling) - IS * **European Goldfinch** - 1, 14/10/96, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS

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

Lesser Frigatebird - 1, 14/7/96, Monkey Mia (Shark Bay) - RS

Australian White Ibis - 25, 4/9/96, Mt Magnet, flying northwards (Mt Magnet) - MB

Square-tailed Kite - 1, 7/96, 20 km N of Kumarina (S of Newman) (Meekatharra) - SN (see article elsewhere in this issue)

Little Eagle - 17-20, 22/9/96, 0.5 km N of Mt Padbury Station HS (Meekatharra) - MG

Peregrine Falcon - at nest with 2 young, 24/10/96, ca. 30 km S of Coolgardie (Coolgardie) (nest on ledge in hollow salmon gum) - JW

Roseate Tern - ca 3500, 23/4/96, Point Quobba (Carnarvon) - AT

Fairy Tern - 8-10 000, 15/8/96, Varanus Island - TK

Princess Parrot - 4, 14/7/96, N of Joanna Springs (Bikarung) at 19o45', 124o10.5' (East Pilbara) - JG per MBa

Grey Honeyeater - 2 plus nest with 1 young and 1 (probably infertile) egg, 17/9/96, N of Wiluna (Wiluna) - MG (see article elsewhere in this issue)

Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush - 1 roadkill, 12/7/96, 123 km N of Mullewa (Murchison) - RS

KIMBERLEY

Magpie Goose - 15 000, 21/10/96, 15 km NNE of Kununurra (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - MC

Great-billed Heron - 1, 2/7/96, Jinunga River - Cone Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC * 1, 7/7/96, King River - Secure Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Cattle Egret - ca. 80 (some in breeding plumage), 11/10/96, 10 km NNW of Kununurra (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - MC (apparently increasing in numbers in this area)

Osprey - nest with three newly hatched young, 7/7/96, near Traverse Island (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Letter-winged Kite - 1, 9/7/96, 5 km N of Camballin Station HS (Derby-West Kimberley) - SN *et al.* * 6, 5/8/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - PB

Square-tailed Kite - 1, 3 and 4/10/96, pindan near Broome (Broome) - BBO (unusual at this time of year)

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - breeding, with one newly hatched chick, 30/6/96, Lacepede Islands (Broome) - KC

Wedge-tailed Eagle - nest with two eggs, 4/7/96, Cone Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Black Falcon - 1, 1/7/96, Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - SN *et al.* * 1, 10/96, Kingston Rest Station (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - REJ (NB: Observers should note that Brown Falcons in many parts of WA can be very dark and easily confused with Black Falcons)

Buff-banded Rail - 1, 6/7/96, Freshwater Cove, N of Doubtful Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Australian Spotted Crake - 6+, 19/10/96, Derby sewage ponds (Derby-West Kimberley) - FO, GS (very few Kimberley records)

Bar-tailed Godwit - 600, 18/8/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO

Asian Dowitcher - 1, 30/6/96, Lacepede Islands (Broome) - KC

Great Knot - 4000, 15/9/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO (including one with an orange leg flag from Victoria; first Great Knot from Victoria)

Red-necked Stint - 500, including 10 in full breeding

plumage, 3/8/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO (early return)

Long-toed Stint - 10+, 19/10/96, Derby sewage ponds (Derby-West Kimberley) - FO, GS

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper - 1, 12/8/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - CH (early return)

Pied Oystercatcher - 2 pairs with young, 3/7/96, Bald Rock - Cone Bay (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Little Ringed Plover - 1, 9/9/96, Taylors Lagoon, near Broome (Broome) - JF, BH, CW (description taken)

Red-capped Plover - 300+ and 6 pairs with newly hatched young, 14/7/96, Crescent Lake, Dampier Peninsula (Broome) - KC

Oriental Plover - 1, 18/8/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO (very early return)

Caspian Tern - 1 pair breeding, 5/7/96, Mulgudna Island (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC * 25 pairs breeding, 30/6/96, Lacepede Islands (Broome) - KC

Roseate Tern - ca. 20 pairs with runners, 30/6/96, Lacepede Islands (Broome) - KC

Little Tern - 2 pairs, apparently breeding, 5/7/96, Mulgudna Island (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC (birds in full breeding plumage, attacking intruders, apparently defending young sheltering amongst rocks) * ca. 10 pairs, breeding (most with eggs), 10/96, Myres Island, near Walsh Point (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - GS (very few breeding records for WA)

Pied Imperial Pigeon - 1, 13/10/96, Broome (in gardens) (Broome) - BBO (first reported by Mr and Mrs Tilley) (the first record for Broome; this record represents the south-western known range limit for this species)

Varied Lorikeet - 16, 22/10/96, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - GL (at southern limit of distribution)

Channel-billed Cuckoo - 8 in one tree, 17/10/96, Point Springs Nature Reserve, NE of Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - MC

Rufous Owl - 1, 3/8/96, Wren Gorge near Calder River (Derby-West Kimberley) - KC

Yellow Wagtail - 1, 8/10/96, Broome sewage ponds (Broome) - MCA *et al.* * 1, 19/10/96, Derby sewage ponds (Derby-West Kimberley) - FO, GS

Gouldian Finch - 60+, 3/7/96, Ellenbrae Station (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - SN *et al.*

Barn Swallow - 4, 8/10/96, Broome sewage ponds (Broome) - MCA *et al.* * 2, passing very low (migrating?) between Ashmore Reef and Cartier Island, at about 120°20'S, 123°19'E - FO * 6, 19/10/96, Derby sewage ponds (Derby-West Kimberley) - FO, GS

OBSERVERS

AB = Andrew Bailey

AT = Tony Tree

BBa = Bryan Barrett

BBO = Broome Bird Observatory

BH = Becky Hayward

BL = Brendan Lepschi

BM = Bill McRoberts

BN = Brenda Newbey

BW = Bev Wilcox

CH = Chris Hassell

CN = Clive Napier

CW = Chris Wilder

DC = Dave Crossley

FO = Frank O'Connor

GL = Graeme Little

GS = George Swann

IS = Ian Standring

JB = John Blyth

JuB = Judy Blyth

JC = Jan Crossley

JF = Jon Fallaw

JG = John Gregory

JW = Jim Wallace

KC = Kevin Coate

KD = Kate Dawson

KM = Karen McRoberts

MB = Mary Bremner

MBa = Mike Bamford

MC = Michael Craig

MCA = Mike Carter

MCI = Margery Clegg

MG = Martin Gole

PPT = Perth Pelagic Trip,

organised by Frank O'Connor

RD = Ray Downes

REJ = Ron Johnstone

RL = Richard Loyn

RP = Ross Payton

RS = Rod Smith

SN = Simon Nevill

TL = Terena Lally

WN = Wendy Napier

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Notes for Contributors

The Editors request contributors to note:

- WABN publishes material of interest to the WA Group
- contributions should be written or typed with **double spacing**—a copy on disk of word processed documents would assist, especially if in WordPerfect or MS Word format. A style sheet is available from Perry House to guide writers regarding format
- WABN uses RAOU recommended English names
- contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary.

Deadline for the March 1997 Issue

15 January 1997

at Perry House

Deadline Request: PLEASE, if at all possible, ensure that material for the March 1997 edition of WABN is at Perry House by 15th January 1997, not February 1st. Our wonderful secretary, Margaret Phillipson, will be away from the 22nd of January.



A young Australasian Gannet on Warnbro Beach
Photo: Ian Gale

The bird was in poor condition and has been cared for by a local veterinarian and wildlife carer. Once fully recovered, the bird will be released near Penguin Island.

Ian Gale

Letters to the Editors

I am writing to see if readers can help identify a bird I saw on 7 September 1996 perched in a Cape Lilac tree in Subiaco.

In overall appearance it was the shape of a Grey Butcherbird with similar shape head and beak. Its head and eyes were dark brown with a grey chest and a faint grey streak on the outside of its wings. A greyish streak was on its neck. Its outside wings were a lighter brown than its head and its tail was wedge-shaped with a grey patch just above the tail on its back. Its legs were dark brown.

The bird sang most of the time I observed it, and it was the song that initially attracted my attention. It was a very melodic song and the nearest I can describe it is that it was not unlike the beginning of "Hernando's Hideaway". I also think it had a raucous chortle not unlike a twenty-eight but this may have been a nearby twenty-eight although I couldn't see any. It was very animated and energetic in its singing with its beak open in song and its wings and tail bobbing as well.

It seemed to occasionally feed off the bark of the branches in the tree perhaps picking off bugs. There was a certain fluffiness in appearance possibly indicating an immature bird. As I watched, it was bombed by a Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike.

Can any reader throw any light on this sighting?

Tom Jeffcote

WA Group Reports

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:

Survey of Suburban Birds Project, Birds on Farms Project and Publicity and Education Activities — these are all the subject of special reports elsewhere in the Reports section.

Hooded Plover Project — the Esperance birdwatchers group has been asked to continue regular monitoring of the lakes areas frequented by the Hooded Plover in an endeavour to obtain more information about these birds; the assistance of CALM is to be sought in enhancing the management of those areas which are reserves.

Independent Incorporation — advice has been received to the effect that grants of more than \$5000 could be received from the Gordon Reid Foundation as the RAOU WA Group is sufficiently autonomous, and it therefore does not seem to be necessary to seek independent incorporation in WA.

Birding Sites Around Perth Revised Edition — up-to-date data are being collected on the selected sites, with Claire Mercer as the project coordinator, collating the information and preparing it for the typesetter and subsequent publication by UWA Press; sponsorship is being sought from members and local government councils towards cost of preparation for printing.

Healthway Funding Application — we have received \$1000 from Healthway to be spent on promotion, walks and brochures.

Office Computer Upgrade — thanks to a donation by Frank O'Connor of a 486 computer and the purchase of a laser printer, the office is now well set up to handle the Database of WA Birds as well as the usual office correspondence, etc.

Excursions — during this calendar year, our excursions sub-committee (Bill McRoberts, Bryan Barrett, Sue Abbotts and Clive Napier) have been very busy with 68 outings (averaging almost one every five days!) completed or scheduled; numerous campouts have been very well attended.

Twitchathon — this has been arranged for the 24 hours from 8 am Saturday 21 to 8 am Sunday 22 December, with breakfast being available from 8.30 am at Perry House for all participants; country groups and new members are especially invited to join in, and the Committee is also inviting all office/project volunteers to attend the breakfast, as a way of saying "thank you" for your efforts during the year; see under Notices for more information.

Request by HQ for a Loan — this request was rejected as WA Group funds are well utilised, with several projects in hand or planned; it is also necessary to have funds available to meet any regular or unforeseen expenses. To date this year a total of \$33,000 has been expended.

Annual General Meeting 1997 — this will be held on Monday 24 February in conjunction with the General Meeting; any members who feel they could contribute something to the work of the Committee are invited to seek nomination as new

ideas are always welcome — nomination forms will be available at Perry House from January.

New Venue for General Meetings — apologies to members who recently attended meetings at the wrong venue or time — there do seem to have been 'gremlins' about when trying to advise everyone of the changes; however we hope that all those who have attended the new venue at the State Tennis Centre at Burswood (commencing at 8 pm) are suitably impressed with its facilities and surely this site will do us for the next ten years at least!

Access to Kununurra Sewage Ponds — the Water Corporation has recently advised that there is no public access to these ponds, contrary to the information contained in the Kununurra birdwatching brochure, so if you are holding one of these brochures would you kindly blank out the item regarding access.

New 'Common' Name for the RAOU — at the special meeting held during the Southern Hemisphere Ornithological Congress at Albany in October, approval was given for the name "Birds Australia" for day-to-day use, although it seems likely to be revised to "The Birds Australia Group" as this name would provide a stronger marketing image.

Meeting with HQ Representatives — with HQ staff attending the Congress at Albany, it was a good time for them to also meet up with our members, including a get-together with most of the Committee on 5 October, to talk over any matters which may have been puzzling to those from the 'other side'.

Trading Table — the bird cards are still selling well and reprints are being organised for several cards; the trial plates and cups have been popular and will be restocked when available; any suggestions of new items for sale would be welcome as the trading table is a major source of income for our special projects.

Clive Napier, Chairman

EXCURSION REPORT FOR 1996

This past year has been a very busy one. By the end of the year we will have had a total of 68 outings, consisting of 25 full-days, 17 half-days, 14 mid-weeks, 11 campouts, and a 24-hour twitchathon. I hope members have appreciated this full program, and thank them for their support.

I'd like to thank our Excursions Committee (Sue Abbotts, Bryan Barrett and Clive Napier) for all their hard work. Also, a big thank you to all our excursion leaders; without you there wouldn't be any outings!

And a special thanks to my wife, Karen, for typing and correcting all the bird walk notes, and sending them off by Email.

Happy Birding!

Bill McRoberts
Excursions Sub-committee Chairman

BIRDS ON FARMS UPDATE

Over the last two months, the major effort has been in letting landholders and birdwatchers know about the Birds on Farms Project, and equipping volunteers with the requisite information so that a start could be made.

So far (by 28 October) over a hundred people have responded. Some have offered farms for survey and some have offered their services as birdwatchers. Most either have a farm and are prepared to do the survey, or are birdwatchers who

have found a farm to survey. The farms are throughout the south-west from the south coast to Northampton. Then there is a huge gap before a cluster of farms at Kununurra. One pastoral property near Kununurra is likely to participate. Although we were not initially targeting stations, it has been decided that it would add to the overall value of the project if some stations were included.

To date, eight sets of survey results have been received — from Morawa, Coorow, Goomalling, York, Brookton, Ongerup, Yallingup and Mount Barker. The number of species recorded ranged from 12 to 30. Species present in each survey area were Australian Ringneck, Australian Magpie and Australian Raven. Brown Honeyeaters were in seven of the sites; seven recorded small tree gleaners such as Weebills or thornbills; only four recorded birds of prey.

This is a national project so all the data will be analysed with data from elsewhere in Australia. As well, we are hoping to do some analysis specific to WA. The more participants, the more meaningful will be the results.

If you are considering joining the project it is not too late. Starting in summer will not be a disadvantage. You will still be expected to do the survey a minimum of eight times (i.e., each quarter for two years).

There are farms awaiting birdwatchers at Ajana, Badgingarra, Baldvis, Dumbleyung, Karlgarin and Kulin. Let me know if you can help.

I have now assisted with a survey so should be well able to answer any questions you may have and of course I am hoping to hear from everyone who has already expressed interest in the project.

Brenda Newbey
WA Group Coordinator
RAOU Birds on Farms Project

Note: The above refers only to records sent to the WA coordinator. A few joined the program earlier and are sending their results directly to Geoff Barrett. Any WA analysis will include all WA results.

SPREADING THE WORD ABOUT BIRDS

The RAOU (WA Group) is represented at numerous community events, usually with photographic displays and our trading table. In this way, we help to introduce people to the activities and role of the RAOU, and quite a few new members join because of this contact. I have decided to report such efforts over the previous three months so that other RAOU members can see something of what we are doing in the community.

August 15-18: Talk to the Animals Expo at Ascot Racecourse. The RAOU's space was filled with displays — *Local Birds*, *The Hollow Question*, and *RAOU Activities for Members* — and our trading table, which was enhanced by eight mounted birds borrowed from the Western Australian Museum. Children (under close supervision) delighted in touching these specimens and asked many questions. However, due to our position being next to the very noisy stage, conversation was difficult, and sales were not significant. Many thanks to the many volunteers who staffed our part in this four-day event.

August 20-29: Our display, *In Praise of Penguins*, was on view in Thornlie Library.

August 20: A Science Education Day at City Beach Primary School, with numerous hands-on activities provided for eager young students from a range of local schools. Our part was to talk to groups of children by Perry Lake, showing them photographs of local birds first, then how to use the binoculars and taking them for a bird walk around the lake. A final session was with teachers on how to incorporate bird studies into curricula.

Late August: At the **Mullewa Wildflower Show**, the RAOU mounted a very ambitious diorama of local birds and habitats, using birds from the Western Australian Museum. Allan Jones was instrumental in organising this with much assistance from John Dell. Volunteers who helped on our trading table were too numerous to mention, but all deserve thanks. Brenda Newbey, the WA Coordinator of Birds on Farms, launched this new project at Mullewa.

September 8: Spring Fling, the Wildflower Society of WA's big event of the year. Peter Anson coordinated the RAOU's free bird walks all day in Bold Park and around Perry Lakes, while Clive Nealon took care of our trading table in the huge marquee erected in front of Perry House. Judy Blyth as usual prepared the static display — of birds local to Bold Park. An excellent day and thanks to the Wildflower Society and to all the volunteers who helped.

RAOU's display, *Threatened Birds of WA*, was on view at the **Dalwallinu Agricultural Show on August 24**, and from **September 12-15 during Wattle Week Wildflower Show at Wubin**.

September 14: Clive Napier addressed the combined Australian Trefoil Guild (Retired Senior Guides) at Bateman.

September 19-21: Thanks to Viv Dare, Norah Brockman, Dick Store, Claire Mercer, Roz Denny and Phyllis Bentley, the RAOU had a presence at the three-day **Busselton Wildflower Show**. As well as our trading table, we had a photographic display of birds local to the area.

October 19: Enviro-Neighbourhood Day, Palmyra. With our *How to Attract Birds to Your Garden* display set up in one of the many tents on this community day, Brian Wilson and Judy Blyth had pleasant talks with several local people and sold items from our trading table. Small displays for two RAOU projects — Birds on Farms and the Suburban Bird Survey — were on view.

October 27: We celebrated **National Bird Week** by holding an **Open House** at our headquarters in Perry House, and offering five **free bird walks** to the public. Three displays, *Birds of Bold Park*, *The Hollow Question* and the *RAOU Activities for Members*, were mounted in the Common Room where free morning and afternoon teas were provided to thirsty participants of the bird walks. A trading table was available for purchasing items, and Birds on Farms and the Suburban Bird Survey were promoted. Thanks to Brian Wilson, Brenda Newbey, Audrey Turner, Roz Denny and Norah Brockman for help during this day.

November 17: The RAOU was represented at **Earthfest** in Pioneer Park, Gosnells with a local birds display and trading table.

November 24: Brownies' Day at Bold Park- Judy and other RAOU volunteers helped about 30 Brownies to see bush birds.

**Judy Blyth
Publicity/Education**

PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

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

Lake Mealup News, Lake Mealup Preservation Society, Winter 1996 vol 9, Issue 2

The Greener Times, Conservation Council of WA, March, May, July-September 1996

On the Brink!, Newsletter of the Endangered Species Program, No 8, June 1996

Queensland Wader, Newsletter of QWSG, Autumn 1996 Management Plan, Purnululu National Park, CALM and National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority, 1995-2005

Draft Management Plan, Karijini National Park, CALM and National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority, 1995 Review of Natural Resource Management and Viability of Agriculture in WA, A Discussion Document, Agriculture WA, June 1996

Newsletter, Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc, May/June 1996 vol 17 No 6, July/August 1996, vol 18 no 1

WATSNU, Newsletter of WA Threatened Species and Communities Unit, CALM, August 1996

Tattler, Newsletter of AWSG, No 8, July 1996

The Bird Observer, Bird Observers Club of Australia, July 1996 No 765, September 1996 No 767, October 1996 No 768 Newsletter, SA Ornithological Association Inc, June 1996, No 158, September 1996 No 159

Narpulungup News, Fitzgerald River National Park Association newsletter, June 1996

Vicgroup Newsletter, RAOU Victoria, September 1996 No 40

World Heritage, Management Planning for Shark Bay WA, CALM, August 1996

Broome Bird Observatory newsletter and minutes, May 1996

Reports: RGC Wetlands Centre, May-July 1996

Readers Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds, Readers Digest, 1979 (donated by K R Waldren)

SUBURBAN BIRD SURVEY

The number of observations received by the survey has now gone past 34 000, and it is possible to start some preliminary analysis. Looking at the observations received from gardens and sites located at varying distances from the Central Post Office in Perth, and bearing in mind that there is a wide disparity in the number of observed locations within each area, the following results may be of interest.

Five species introduced to WA are among the 23 most recorded species in the survey. The Laughing Turtle-Dove is sixth most frequently recorded, the Rainbow Lorikeet 10th, the Laughing Kookaburra 14th, the Spotted Turtle-Dove 15th, and the Rock Dove 23rd. Within 5 km of the Post Office, the Rainbow Lorikeet is the second most commonly reported species after the Singing Honeyeater. In fact, it is recorded on 96% of record sheets submitted from within the 5 km range, and in gardens in the same area, the Rainbow Lorikeet is the most commonly reported bird.

As we move away from the city centre, the incidence of the Rainbow Lorikeet drops, until there is just a single record past the 30 km radius. The Laughing Turtle-Dove has spread evenly from the centre of the city — it is equally commonly reported within the 80 km radius as it is within the 5 km radius, in terms of its position on the list of the most commonly

reported species.

The survey has continued strongly over the last three months, but there is still a need to attract many more observers. Since the last report, there has not been a great extension of the area covered by the survey and there is still a lot of the metropolitan area that remains to be covered. There are virtually no records between the 40 km and the 80 km distance from the city centre.

My thanks to all those people who have submitted records already. I hope that your observations will continue to arrive and that you will encourage others to respond to the call. Remember that record submission is not restricted to RAOU members. Please invite anyone you know who has a passing interest in the birds about them to submit their records. Experience has shown that once people have started taking note of what birds they are seeing, enthusiasm takes over and the records keep coming in.

To reiterate the suggestions made in the last issue of WABN,

- you should consider the observation period to be a week,
- everybody should record observations from Saturday to Friday (inclusive) each week,
- each bird seen during the week should be indicated on the form with a 'tick',
- the use of 'O' to indicate that the bird was seen on other than the prime observation day should be discontinued, and
- you continue to use the 'F' to indicate that the bird was in flight when observed.

There have not been many submissions of 'incidental' records. These reports are to record notable sightings that you make other than at your selected locations. Please report any sightings that you consider noteworthy, wherever they are. These sightings will be registered as 'Incidental' records. If the sighting does take place while you're driving, just try to make sure you can identify where you are so that the sighting can be registered to the correct location. Also send in the report, preferably on a separate form, marked 'Incidental'.

As I stated at the beginning of the report, the database now contains nearly 35 000 individual bird records spread across 187 species. Twenty-seven species are only represented by a single record. The Australian Raven is still the most recorded species, with a very narrow lead over the Australian Magpie and the Singing Honeyeater.

Clive Nealon

OBITUARY: BILL GRAHAM 1909-1996

Bill Graham died in October 1996. He was an unusual RAOU member inasmuch as his great love was history and he had little interest in birds. Instead, Bill spent considerable energy caring for Eyre Bird Observatory, inspired by the fact that his grandfather had spent 30 years at the (then) Eyre Telegraph Station from the time that it commenced operating. Bill's interest in Eyre's history ensured that he spent much time there. It was he who supervised the restoration of the deserted building in 1977 to make it habitable, thereby creating Australia's first bird observatory. Practically every year since, he was on the dunes, in almost any weather conditions, in a determined effort to halt the encroachment of the dunes on to the old building. From sunrise to sunset he would work, then find a far-off sleeping place to establish a barrier of distance between other sleepers and his own snoring.

At WA Group meetings Bill would constantly remind us of the beauty and importance of Eyre. He would coax us to visit and to plant on the dunes. He worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the Edward John Eyre re-enactment and even walked much of the distance himself, easing off only when his frail body refused to cooperate with his demands.

Bill was a kind, courteous gentleman. He was hard-working and generous. Let us hope that Bill's aspirations for Eyre can be attained. Cheerio, Bill. We miss you.

Rod Smith

Members' Contributions

NORTH KIMBERLEY

In late April and early May this year we were members of a group walking in part of the Drysdale River National Park and Carson River Station in the North Kimberley. After this walk, four days were spent in the Keep River National Park and touring the Kununurra, Ord River and Wyndham areas. Birdwatching was not the prime aim of the group, but we were able to use the rest breaks to good advantage and saw well over 100 species. We were able to positively identify over 90 of them. There were many raptors that we were unable to classify.

Carson and Drysdale Rivers

The walking area was bounded by the Drysdale and Carson Rivers as late rains had left both rivers with good flows and impassable on foot. Though these two major rivers approach to within 10 km of each other they are very different in character. They are separated by the Carson Escarpment, from 100-200 m high and nearly 100 km long. The Carson River runs on the plain through hard basalts and is basically station grassland. The Drysdale runs on the top of the plateau through sandstone in very rugged country and has a number of scenic falls and cataracts. Many of the side streams were running and provided a good water and food supply, and ample cover. The area contains biota intermediate between those of the sub-humid north-west Kimberley and the semi-arid east Kimberley, with open-forest and woodland predominating. Both rivers are lined with Pandanus (*Pandanus spiralis*) and Cadjeput paperbark trees (*Melaleuca leucadendron*, *M. argentea* and *M. viridiflora*). Only the paperbarks on the Drysdale were in flower and provided a focus for many nectar feeders. An area of extensive swampland on the top of the plateau had numerous birds, but as we arrived just before sunset we could not stay. It would be well worth a detailed study.

Blue-winged Kookaburras and Great Bowerbirds were common in some areas. It was noted that on many occasions the Great Bowerbirds were closely associated with Little Friarbirds, often one of each perched together. Bar-breasted Honeyeaters were still nesting and could be seen feeding their young in nests suspended over the watercourses along the Drysdale. Crimson, Long-tailed and Masked Finches favoured the Pandanus along the streams. In one area we saw a group of Variegated Fairy-wrens working their way through dense undergrowth, a Restless Flycatcher hawking for insects and a female Shining Flycatcher moving slowly through the vegetation.

One morning we stood at the top of the escarpment and

