

Western Australian Bird Notes

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

No 81 March 1997

COOPERATION BETWEEN HONEYEATER SPECIES

Ten metres from my home window at Wannamal an *Eremophila laanii* is growing. It stands among *Eremophila glabra*, *pterocarpa*, *maculata*, *aurus* and *nivea*. Beyond this group is a clump of *Grevillea* 'Superb'; to the east is a large area of *Grevillea obtusifolia* (Gingin Gem); to the west is a driveway and then more *Eremophila* and *Grevillea* with a *Eucalyptus angulosa*, beneath which are bird baths.

The *Eremophila laanii* has pale pink-red flowers and is a highly preferred and sought after source of nectar by comparison with the flowers of the other plants above.

While eating breakfast (July 1996) by the window I heard the call of a Little Wattlebird close at hand. The bird calling was visible in the *E. laanii* except that on closer inspection it was a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater!

When these attractive birds first appeared in the garden they called in 'Brown Honeyeater' (not very credibly) but more recently have always passed themselves off as Little Wattlebirds. In this they are much more successful and the only difference the human ear can discern is that the genuine Little Wattlebird call is less soft and has greater carrying power.

The Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater remained in the *E. laanii* all day, defending easily against forays by New Holland and Brown Honeyeaters and with more difficulty but successfully against occasional Red Wattlebirds and Red-capped Parrots.

Next morning at the same time a Little Wattlebird call sounded and

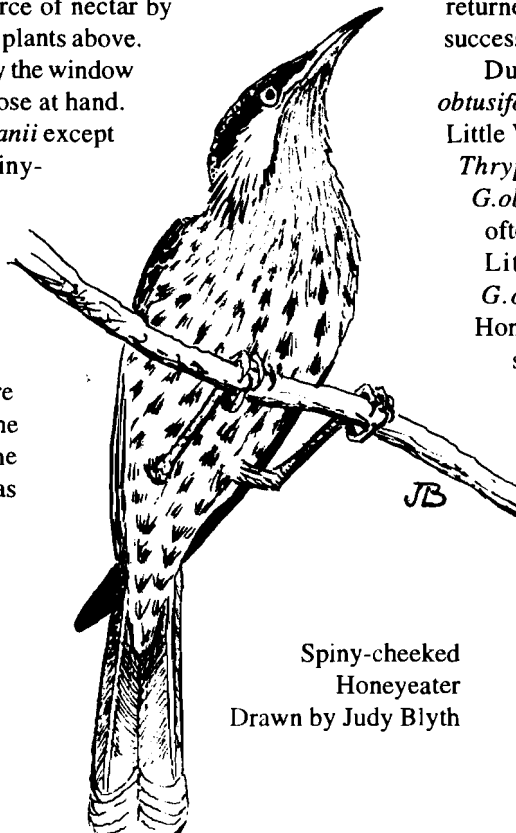
inspection of the *Eremophila* bush revealed a Little Wattlebird and a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater together. They jointly defended their nectar supply against all comers and 'talked' together in 'Little Wattlebird'.

When one of the two ventured away to another of the nearby nectar sources the partner remained at the important *E. laanii* base as defender, and if the repelling of an intruder was required the absent bird returned to assist. This arrangement continued successfully for three days.

During these three days the *Grevillea obtusifolia* came more fully into bloom and the Little Wattlebird then moved to a perch of dead *Thryptomene saxicola* branches above the *G. obtusifolia* (left for perching purposes and often used). It became clear after this that the Little Wattlebird was defending the *G. obtusifolia* and the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater the *E. laanii* and that these nectar sources were their own 'property', for neither attempted to feed on the other's nectar source, while both shared the surrounding nectar whenever it appeared safe to leave their defended 'territory'.

Being close (some two metres apart) there was a good deal of 'Little Wattlebird talk' between them during the day and they continued to assist each other in time of need.

New Holland Honeyeaters, being more aggressive than Brown Honeyeaters, continually attempted to gain access to the *E. laanii* and



Spiny-cheeked
Honeyeater
Drawn by Judy Blyth

to a lesser extent the *G. obtusifolia*, though a careful watch was kept by both defenders against both intruder species.

Half way through the second week, while both the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and the Little Wattlebird remained vigilant all day in their respective territories, a persistent New Holland Honeyeater, having been pursued up and down the *E. laanii* by the Spiny-cheeked, flew as though to depart but circled around to return to the *E. laanii*.

The Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater then pursued the bold intruder around the *E. laanii* branches with greater vigour than previously, finally driving it off. The New Holland intruder flew, calling loudly and pursued closely by the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater which left its base in hot pursuit for the first time, to the *E. angulosa* where a large party of 'colleagues' were bathing.

After perching briefly at the edge of the *E. angulosa* the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater seemed to realise it was not in its territory and it rapidly returned, pursued part way by three New Holland Honeyeaters.

It then appeared as though the New Holland Honeyeaters, upset by the hot pursuit of their colleague and frustrated in their efforts to obtain the desired nectar, decided on a mass attack to overwhelm the joint Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater/Little Wattlebird defence. With loud calls some 30 New Holland Honeyeaters flew into the *E. laanii*, the adjacent *E. maculata* and the *G. obtusifolia*.

Both defenders counter-attacked vigorously. The Little Wattlebird had fewer intruders to defeat and did so quite quickly; the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater had a greater number and because of the branches of the *E. laanii* the more difficult task. When all had been dispersed from the *G. obtusifolia* blossom the Little Wattlebird flew to assist its comrade and between them they chased the New Holland Honeyeaters out of the *E. laanii*, then from the *E. maculata* and finally from the more distant *Grevillea* 'Superb'.

"... defended their nectar supply against all comers and 'talked' together in 'Little Wattlebird'."

When all was back to normal, the Little Wattlebird returned to its perch on a dead branch. After a while the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater left its base, flew to a branch just below that of the Little Wattlebird and proceeded to sing in 'Little Wattlebird' to its adjacent partner for about a minute, before returning to the *E. laanii*.

After three weeks of joint defensive behaviour the Little Wattlebird began to range more widely about the garden, only defending the *G. obtusifolia* when it was feeding there and in the fourth week the Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater took much the same view of the *E. laanii*. In a little over four weeks the nectar was left wholly to others.

Co-operation between different species of birds appears unusual. Most references are to communal breeding within species. Pied Butcherbirds and Australian Hobbies may hunt together, but this may be more opportunistic than co-operative.

Such co-operation between species as described above appears rare.

Bruce Buchanan

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.

This issue sees a report of another new bird for the list of birds from Australia and its territories: a number of **Asian House Martins** have been seen on Christmas Island. Other possible additions are also rumoured from Christmas Island, but details are not yet available. An exciting report is that of a **swiftlet** from Barrow Island, but several Asian species are possible, and notoriously difficult to distinguish. A **Franklin's Gull** and a possible **Black-tailed Gull** have been reported from northern WA, but full details are not yet available.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Malleefowl - 1, 13/1/97, active on mound at Dryandra (Williams) - TB * 1, 26/1/97, 20 km SE of Merredin (Merredin) - RK

Freckled Duck - 7, 18/1/97, Lake Joondalup (Wanneroo) - RK

Great-winged Petrel - Aug-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

White-headed Petrel - Aug-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Soft-plumaged Petrel - Aug-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Blue Petrel - Sep-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

White-chinned Petrel - Aug-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Grey Petrel - Aug-Oct 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Little Shearwater - 1, 14/9/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Yellow-nosed Albatross - up to 20 per day in Aug 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Red-tailed Tropicbird - 1, 26/1/97, Bremer Bay (Jerramungup) - MV *et al.* (easternmost record for WA)

Australasian Gannet - up to 100 per day, Aug-Sep 96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

White-necked Heron - 10, 21/12 to 4/1/97, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - KL * 20+, 5/1/97, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - RK, LB * 16, 10/1/97, Forrestdale Lake (Armadale) - DJ

Square-tailed Kite - 3, 3/9/96, Augusta (hill above lighthouse) (Augusta-Margaret River) - RP * 1, 2/12/96. Redgate Beach Road, near Margaret River (Augusta-Margaret River) - CW

White-bellied Sea-Eagle - 1, 26/11/96, Football Lake and Betts Swamp, Wannamal (Gingin) - BB (unusual in this area)

Baillon's Crake - 2, 13/1/97, James Swamp, Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ * 1, 22/1/97, Twin Bartram Swamp (Armadale) - MBa * 1, 2/2/97, Kogolup (Cockburn) - JD

Marsh Sandpiper - 1, 9/12/96, Lake Toolibin (Wickepin) - CH, JSp

Terek Sandpiper - 3, 7/12/96, Creery wetlands (Murray) - MS

Long-toed Stint - 3, 12/1/97, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) - KL

Pectoral Sandpiper - 3, 12/1/97, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) - KL * 1, 9/2/97, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - JB, JuB

Ruff - 1, 26/1/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, JD

Bush Stone-curlew - 2, 2/97, Bakers Hill (Northam) - SD

Pied Oystercatcher - 1, noticeably larger than other nearby Pied Oystercatchers, and with blotchy demarcation between the black breast and white belly, 30/9/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - KL (A bird fitting this description was first seen in July 1992 (JD, TK) and was recorded regularly for 15 mths after which it was no longer seen; that bird will be illustrated in the forthcoming Handbook of WA Birds; the present bird is possibly the same one as that seen in 1992)

Banded Stilt - 20 000, 12/12/96, Lake Dumbleyung (Dumbleyung) - AC

Hooded Plover - 2, 12/9/96, Skippy Rock (Augusta-Margaret River) - RP * 1, 8/12/96, Karakin Swamp (Gingin) - RAOU excursion * 1, 7/12/96, Woodman Point (Cockburn) - KL * 2, 11/12/96, Lake Kwoncicup (Plantagenet) - AC * 77 (including 18 juveniles), 25/1/97, Wellstead Estuary (Jerramungup) - RAOU excursion

Arctic Jaeger - 1, 9/8/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Pacific Gull - 1 pair, breeding, 9/11/96, Lancelin Island (Gingin) - ND (first breeding record for this species on Lancelin Island)

Silver Gull - 1 all black bird, 16/1/97, Safety Bay (Rockingham) - BG (see photograph elsewhere in this issue)

Sooty Tern - 2 in courtship flight, 9/11/96, Lancelin Island (Gingin) - ND (rare south of the Abrolhos)

Whiskered Tern - ca. 12, 27/12/96 to 4/1/97, Thomsons Lake (Cockburn) - KL * 8, 26/1/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, JD

White-winged Black Tern - 12, 26/1/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - TK, JD

Common Noddy - 300+ pairs breeding, 11/96, Lancelin Island (Gingin) - ND (this colony was first reported in 1992 (WABN 61: 2) when only five breeding attempts were recorded)

Lesser Noddy - 2 (1 immature, 1 non-breeding adult), 9/11/96, Lancelin Island (Gingin) - ND (rarely seen south of the Abrolhos)

Barking Owl - 1, 12/10/96, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) - RP

Hooded Robin - 3, 1/8/96, corner of Warton and Forrest Roads, Banjup (Cockburn) - DJ * 1, 17/8/96, Anstey Road bushland, Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ (unusual in Perth metro. area)

White-breasted Robin - 1, 16/11/96, Pipidinny Swamp (Wanneroo) - RAOU excursion per BBa, MCI

White-winged Triller - 8, 20/12/96, Anstey Road,

Forrestdale (Armadale) - DJ (high number for near Perth)

European Goldfinch - 1, 12/96, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - LK (presumed aviary escapee)

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

Wandering Whistling-Duck - 2, 17/9/96, McNeill Claypan, near Carnarvon (Carnarvon) - DJ (Few records for the Gascoyne region)

Black Falcon - 1 (and possibly others), 9/96, 20 km SW of Sandstone on road to Paynes Find (Sandstone) - MG

Roseate Tern - 40-50 000, 13/9/96, Varanus Island (Roebourne) - TK

Bridled Tern - thousands, 10/96, Varanus Island (Roebourne) - TK

swiftlet species - 1, similar to a White-rumped Swiftlet but with a square tail (several Asian species possible), 28/1/97, Barrow Island (Roebourne) - MBa, KY

KIMBERLEY

Wandering Whistling-Duck - 23, 15/1/97, Taylor's Lagoon (Broome) - BBO

Snipe, presumed to be Swinhoe's - 5, 14/1/97, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) - BBO

Marsh Sandpiper - 40, 19/11/96, Lake Eda (Broome) - BBO

Pectoral Sandpiper - 1, 14/11/96, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) - PCr, BBO (rare in western Kimberley)

Ruff - 1, 14/11/96, Broome Sewage Works (Broome) - PCr, BBO

Pacific Golden Plover - 30, 16/1/97, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - J. Barkla per BBO

Oriental Plover - 400, 10/11/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO (during a period of extreme hot weather (40°+))

Black-fronted Dotterel - 33, 19/11/96, Taylor's Lagoon (Broome) - BBO

Oriental Pratincole - 300, 16/1/97, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - J. Barkla per BBO

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo - 1 female caught in mist net and banded, 27/3/96; Quarry Beach between Broome and the Observatory (Broome) - PC, AT *et al.*

Channel-billed Cuckoo - 1, 14/1/97, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - C. Lester per BBO

Fork-tailed Swift - 150, 30/12/96, Argyle Diamonds village (Wyndham-East Kimberley) - FO

White-fronted Honeyeater - 5, 13/3/96, Broome port (Broome) - PC, RJ (at extreme northern limit)

Pied Honeyeater - 5, 11/11/96, Broome Bird Observatory (Broome) - BBO (at northern limit of distribution)

Pictorella Mannikin - 7, 13/3/96, Broome port (Broome) - PC, RJ (rarely recorded this far west)

Gouldian Finch - 2 (1 juvenile), 29/11/95, Cape Leveque (Broome) - PC, RJ * 1, 23/1/96, Cape Leveque (Broome) - PC, RJ

Barn Swallow - 50, 12/11/96, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - BBO

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Barn Swallow - 10, 25/11/96, at the rubbish tip - KC

Asian House-Martin - 1, 25/11/96, Murray Hill - KC *et al.* (new species for Christmas Island and the Australian list - see details elsewhere in this issue)

COCOS-KEELING ISLANDS

Buff-banded Rail - 12+, 21/11/96, North Keeling - KC

Ruddy Turnstone - 3, 21/11/96, North Keeling - KC

Pacific Golden Plover - 5, 20/11/96, airstrip on West Island - KC

Oriental Pratincole - 7, 20/11/96, airstrip on West Island - KC

OBSERVERS

AC = Alan Clarke

AT = Tony Tree

BB = Bruce Buchanan

BBa = Bryan Barrett

BBO = Broome Bird Observatory

BG = Bob Goodale

CH = Chris Hassell

CW = Chris Wilder

DJ = David James

FO = Frank O'Connor

JB = John Blyth

JuB = Judy Blyth

JD = John Darnell

JSp = Janet Sparrow

KC = Kevin Coate

KL = Kim-Chye Lim

KY = Ken Youngson

LB = Liz Bowles

LK = Lawrence Knight

MBa = Mike Bamford

MCl = Margery Clegg

MG = Martin Gole

MS = Marcus Singor

MV = Mary Vaughan

ND = Nic Dunlop

PC = Peter Collins

PCr = Peter Crabtree

RJ = Ros Jessop

RK = Richard King

RP = Ross Payton

SD = Stephen Davies

TB = Tim Blake

TK = Tony Kirkby

Obituary: Peter John Anson

Peter passed away suddenly on 6 January this year aged 75.

Although he was known to many of us as our hard-working honorary treasurer and as a valuable member of the WA Group in many other ways, Peter did not talk much about himself and his past life. Some account of his career has, however, been gleaned from several members, and his close friend Group Captain Bartlett has kindly provided information about Peter's time in the Air Force.

In his youth in Britain, Peter and a friend of his were interested in car racing. This interest led the pair to apply to join the Royal Air Force as mechanics. Peter's recruiting officer, however, persuaded him to enlist as a potential pilot. It was therefore as a fighter pilot that Peter took part in World War II, during which he rose to the rank of wing commander.

Peter began pilot training in Britain in August 1940 and in April 1941 joined B Flight of 504 Squadron, which flew Hurricanes, as a Sergeant Pilot. Later the same year he was stationed at Murmansk in northeastern Russia and was involved in the air defence of the town. From 1942 to 1944 Peter flew Spitfires in fighter sweeps over occupied France, took part in various operations in North Africa, was an instructor at the British Operations Training Unit, and flew Thunderbolt fighter bombers in Burma. In 1944 he was

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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 June 1997 Issue

**1 May 1997
at Perry House**

awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross).

In 1945 Peter became aide-de-camp to Lord Mountbatten and later to Air Marshal Bill Williams. After the war Peter remained associated with the Royal Air Force and later the Air Ministry until he emigrated to Western Australia in 1967, giving up the imminent prospect of promotion in the Air Ministry to do so. In WA, he flew civilian aircraft for the company known as Civil Flying Services and later for Bell Brothers.

Peter retired from flying in 1974 and began his own successful grocery business and later an equally successful jewellery business, in which he made model jewellery and silverware.

A particular outlet for his spare energies in later years was windsurfing, although he found that a 'hot board' had

much the same effect on his arms as that instrument of torture, the medieval rack! Another such outlet was cycling, for he owned a splendid machine with some 20 gears and took it over some rough country. One of his exploits was to ride it through Wungong Gorge, being reduced to pushing it only once by a particularly difficult hill.

An interest in birds and membership of the RAOU came to Peter after his retirement from business in 1987. Having become a member of the WA Group, Peter brought his business skills, considerable energy, and capacity for taking pains, to the task of looking after the Group's finances. The treasurership, although vital to the smooth running of our affairs, is not always the most sought after post on our Committee and Peter probably served longer in that post than he would have liked. Nevertheless, he always maintained, and sought to improve on, a very high standard of performance. In addition, he helped other members of the Group at Perry House and elsewhere in all sorts of practical ways, for he was a prolific maker of useful gadgets in his workshop. Many of us, too, will have taken part in bird walks led by Peter. Nothing, it seemed, was too much trouble for him.

The loss of Peter will be most keenly felt by the Group, especially those on the Committee with him, and others of us who came to appreciate Peter greatly for his interest and energy, his sense of humour and his essential, unflinching kindness and helpfulness. We have the consolation of knowing that birding and the company of fellow birders gave him great pleasure to the end.

Our deepest sympathies go to Rose and the other members of his family.

Jeremy Talbot

Letters to the Editors

RAINBOW LORIKEETS HARASSING AN EGRET

On Sunday afternoon the first day of December 1996, I was on the roof of the shed at our home in Wembley when I saw a Great Egret flying overhead, perhaps heading for Herdsman Lake.

A few seconds later I heard the calls of Rainbow Lorikeets and saw two of them flying after the Egret and harassing it, flying to within a metre of its back. Do any readers have suggestions as to the reasons for this strange behaviour?

Margaret Owen

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:

- Death of our Treasurer, Peter Anson — the Committee was shocked to learn of Peter's death on 6 January. We

will miss Peter very much; he was an enthusiastic 'birder' and respected Committee member and did a tremendous amount for the RAOU; a tribute to him is elsewhere in this newsletter. The services of a professional accountant will be obtained for preparation of the annual 1996 accounts; hopefully, by the time this issue of WABN is received, another willing member will have been found to fill this position.

- Survey of Suburban Birds Project — Clive Nealon reports that about 50 000 records are now held from 190-odd locations.
- Birds on Farms Project — Phyllis Bentley is the project co-ordinator for the time being while Brenda Newbey is on sick leave; an extension of the project has been requested by Main Roads WA with a request for data on the revegetation of main road verges, to be provided four times during the year and costs funded substantially by Main Roads WA.
- *Birding Sites Around Perth* Revised Edition — report elsewhere in this newsletter.
- Publicity/Public Relations/Education — see Judy Blyth's report elsewhere in this newsletter.
- Proposed calendar of events in the bird world — Rod Smith is seeking items from members for inclusion in the calendar.
- Remote area field trip — Bill McRoberts is considering suggestions from members on possible locations.
- Loss of new members — it has been brought to the attention of the Committee that a high proportion of new WA members who have not been receiving *WA Bird Notes*, so leaving them unaware of all the activities, excursions and bird-walks available for members, are not renewing their membership after the first year. The Committee will be sending out complementary copies of WABN during their initial year to new members who have not taken out a subscription and hopefully this will encourage them to retain membership for following years (and, we hope, to subscribe to WABN).
- Twitchathon 21/22 December 1996 — although only seven teams took part, there was some high quality twitching, with the winners (led by Janet Sparrow and Chris Hassell) scoring 119 birds and four teams scoring over 100. It was great fun and added to our enjoyment of the Christmas Breakfast (see below).
- End-of-Year Breakfast 22 December 1996 at Perry House — this get-together was enjoyed by all and a fitting end to a busy year of activities; thanks to Wendy Napier and helpers for organising a delicious breakfast.

Clive Napier, Chairman

PUBLICITY/EDUCATION REPORT (1996)

During 1996, the RAOU (WA) has —

- Mounted 28 displays at 18 locations which have included municipal libraries, Claremont Show-grounds, various community festivals around Perth's suburbs and as far afield as York, Dalwallinu and Wubin. A most ambitious display in the form of a diorama of birds local to the area around Mullewa was mounted during the Mullewa Wildflower Show in August, thanks mainly to Allan Jones, and to WA Museum's John Dell.

- Provided a speaker for 20 talks (several of which were given by Clive Napier) and taken 17 bird walks for schoolchildren, or members of the public.
- Answered requests from students, schools and others in the community for information.
- Publicised public activities run by the RAOU in local newspapers, *The West Australian*, the Department for Environmental Protection's *Ecoplan* newsletter and Geraldton newspapers.
- Produced one major new thematic display, *The Hollow Question* and a small display to promote the *Birds on Farms* project. There are more than a dozen different thematic displays available for borrowing. A history of Perry House has been revised for distribution at our Open Days during Bird Week and other such occasions.

Special thanks to the many RAOU volunteers who have helped fill places on our rosters at the various festivals and for bird walks and talks during the year.

Judy Blyth
Publicity/Education

PUBLICATIONS REPORT

Birding Sites Around Perth by Ron van Delft — Preparation of Revised Edition

In 1996 the Western Australian Group of the RAOU decided that a revised edition of this guide should be prepared to update the information on sites and species.

RAOU members checked all sites to provide the most up-to-date information about all locations.

Site lists of species and annotated lists of other species have been amended using information from many sources.

Two projects of the WA Group, the Database of Western Australian Birds and the Suburban Bird Survey, have provided current information on species distribution.

The reports of sightings in our quarterly magazine, *Western Australian Bird Notes*, have also been very useful and members who regularly visit sites have made their records available.

Current literature on birds of the Perth area has been examined and invaluable assistance given by scientific advisers.

New features in the revised edition include a chapter on eight additional sites.

Rural Brochures Project

The following grants have enabled us to bring our number of brochures to 49 in 1996.

Down to Earth Foundation (for brochures) \$1260; Healthways (for walks, publicity, brochures) \$1000; W.A. Government Community Conservation Grant (for Birds on Farms including brochures) \$1900.

There have been three developments in the program this year. First, the publication of annotated bird lists (Mullewa, Shark Bay and Esperance). Secondly, the publication of metropolitan brochures (Bold Park). Finally, master copies have been sent to organisations on request for them to have the printing carried out at their expense (Pardoo Station, Bibra Lake).

For the future we plan to continue preparing new brochures for both rural and metropolitan areas — Bunbury and Wooleen Station hopefully will be the next two.

We have received communications from members indicating the need for changes to some brochures.

Further activity will, of course, depend on the availability of funds.

Allan Jones

PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

The following reports/journals/books have been received since the last report:

Cumberland Bird Observers Club Inc Newsletter, Nov/Dec 1996, vol 18, No 3

The Tattler — Australasian Wader Studies Group Newsletter, No 9, Oct 1996

The Stilt — East Asian-Australasian Flyway AWSG Bulletin, No 29, Oct 1996

Paper on: *A New Forest and Timber Industry Policy for WA*, Nov 1996

The Greener Times — Conservation Council of WA Inc Journal, Nov/Dec 1996

Reports, RGC Wetlands Centre, Capel, Oct & Nov 1996

Emu, — RAOU Journal, Vol 96, Part 4, Dec 1996 and Supplement to: *The Auk*, Vol 114, No 1, Jan 1997; *The Emu*, Vol 97, No 1, Mar 1997; *The Ibis*, Vol 139, No 1, Jan 1997

Narpulungup News — Fitzgerald River National Park Association Newsletter, Nov 1996

South Australian Ornithological Association Inc Newsletter, No 160, Dec 1996

Helen Clark, Librarian

Members' Contributions

ANOTHER NEW BIRD FOR AUSTRALIA: THE ASIAN HOUSE MARTIN

Christmas Island is fast becoming a mecca for bird watchers, especially during the wet season when interesting vagrants from Asia can sometimes be found. This oceanic island originated as a result of volcanic activity, and although part of the Commonwealth of Australia, it is only 360 km from Jakarta, Indonesia. While taking natural history groups to Christmas Island I have now recorded 49 species of birds, including several new to Australasia, eg., Pond Heron in December 1995 and Common Wheatear in January 1996.

At Christmas Island about 10 am on 25 November 1996, I took a party of six to a lookout on Murray Hill, the highest point of the island, to over-view one of the phosphate mining areas. Below us, above stands of introduced Japanese Cherry (*Muntingia calabura*) were Christmas Island Glossy Swiftlets. One of our group, Per Milberg, a visitor from Sweden, brought to my attention a slightly larger bird with a white rump flying with them. We all had good sightings of this bird as it flew in our immediate vicinity for some 20 minutes. As it was flying back and forth below our vantage point, the appearance to me was of a bird with a broadish wing, not unlike that of a martin. It was dark on the back, had a distinctive white rump and dark tail. A little later the bird flew higher and was level with our vision and at times above us; at such times I noticed the underwing was brown. As it turned and caught the light, I could see a bluish sheen on its back, that did not extend to the wings. The tail had a slight fork, the breast was an off white and there was a slightly darkish bar just below its throat, which was white. With the bird still in view we consulted *A Field*

Guide to the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali by John MacKinnon and Karen Phillipps which I was carrying with me, and all agreed that the bird we saw fitted perfectly the description and illustration of the Asian House Martin (*Delichon dasypus*).

Kevin Coate

Editors' note: Two other similar looking martins also occur in Asia. The Common House Martin (*D. urbica*) has pure white underparts and white (not brown) underwing coverts. The Nepal House Martin (*D. nipalensis*) has black undertail coverts. Interestingly, other observers independently reported Asian House Martins on Christmas Island earlier in the same month.

CHIRRUPING BY SOUTHERN BOOBOOKS.

In early January 1997 one of us observed four owls in trees around his house on a forested, rural block in Roleystone (a 'hills suburb' about 30 km south east of Perth). The owls appeared at dusk and flew from tree to tree until it was dark, frequently chirruping. We both observed them on 9 January. That evening the owls appeared as usual at dusk and chirruped frequently until after dark. The calls would have been mistaken for crickets if they had not always come from trees into which owls had flown. One chirruped in a circling flight through open air immediately above us, confirming that the calls were made by the owls. Initially, using 10x40 Zeiss binoculars, there was sufficient light to clearly identify them as Southern Boobooks.

At Roleystone, the call was only heard in the evening for about ten days while (presumably) two free-flying young accompanied their parents. No typical "boo-book" calls were heard at this time. Hollands (1991) has noted "Females and young in nest use variety of low trills" and Fleay (1968) records apparently fledged young chirruping in Victoria. We are not aware of other records. We appreciate the efforts of Allan Burbidge and John Blyth to find records of Southern Boobooks chirruping.

References:

Fleay, D. (1968). *Nightwatchmen of Bush and Plain: Australian owls and owl-like birds*. Jacaranda Press. Brisbane.

Hollands, D. (1991). *Birds of the Night: Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia*. Reed Books Pty Ltd. Balgowlah, NSW.

A.N. Start and F. Falconer

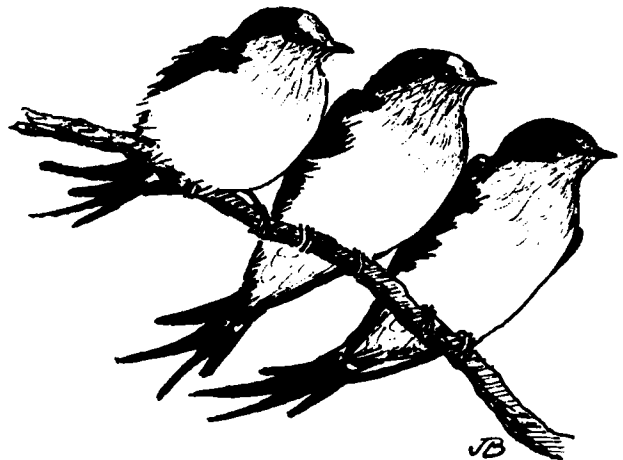
WASPS ATTACKING BIRDS

At Elvire Rock in Mount Elvire State Forest (west of Menzies) on December 29th 1996 it was very hot, probably over 37°C, in the middle of the day. A small dam constructed on the rock surface held a pool of water with a surface area of approximately 400 square metres which was extremely attractive to birds and insects alike. Among the most conspicuous of the constant visitors to the water were Welcome Swallows, Tree Martins and large black and white native wasps, probably *Paragia bicolor* of the family Vespidae.

The wasps were present in many hundreds over a period of two hours, although the individuals were constantly changing. Wasps would fly to the dam, align themselves into the wind and then land on the water surface, spending on average about one second, apparently taking on water. Those

which spent at least a second on the water would take off and fly away in a straight line and in roughly the same direction.

However, the behaviour of many of the wasps changed if a swallow or martin skimmed down to the water surface for a drink on the wing. No sooner would a bird come near the surface of the water than it would be attacked by one or more of the wasps, sometimes by determined squadrons of 40 or 50 individuals which would follow a single bird for up to 100 metres. It seemed to me, from the evasive action taken by the birds, that the wasps were stinging whenever they got close enough.



Welcome Swallows - no match for aggressive native wasps.
Drawn by Judy Blyth

I did not at any time see one of the birds take a wasp, and from what is known of the diet of both species it seems unlikely that they would attempt to eat such a large insect capable of stinging. I can only speculate that the wasps may suffer heavy mortality from Rainbow Bee-eaters, and that they have generalised an aggressive/defensive behaviour to other birds which drink in a similar way, as do swallows and martins.

Thanks to Terry Houston of the WA Museum for his tentative identification over the telephone of *Paragia bicolor*. I was not brave enough to take a specimen, in case I brought the wrath of one of their avenging squadrons upon my head. Terry tells me that wasps of this group are not normally aggressive to larger animals. He suggests that another possible explanation of the observed behaviour is that the aggressive wasps were territorial or sexually charged (but stingless) males chasing anything that flew around their area.

I would be most interested to know if any of our readers have seen similar behaviour on the part of native wasps or other insects, or have any other suggestions as to its origin and purpose.

John Blyth

POSSIBLE SIGHTING OF SANDSTONE SHRIKE-THRUSH AT BROOME

At about 8.30 am on 16 September 1996 while walking along the Malurus Trail, near One Tree about 3 km from the Broome Bird Observatory, I saw some activity in a small clump of trees. The ground there is slightly sloped, fairly open with

odd trees scattered among the rather thick, low grass. The birds I first saw were Yellow White-eyes. While looking around I saw what I first thought, from the first flash of colour, to be a small Great Bowerbird. It was in amongst some thick grass close to the ground. But when it revealed itself it was obviously, by the smaller size and a clearer view of the colour, not a bowerbird. My second thought was that it might be a Grey Shrike-thrush, NW form, though it was nothing like the other Grey Shrike-thrushes I had seen in the area. However, I had no illustration of juvenile Grey Shrike-thrush to compare with. The brightish cinnamon breast and abdomen were very distinctive. I am familiar with Little Shrike-thrushes and did not think this was one.

While looking at the bird which was rather tame and allowed me to within 4-5 m, I studied the illustration in Simpson & Day. The following points were clear: buff streak from bill to eye; finely streaked throat and breast; black legs and eyes; bill not entirely black, some light horny colour could be seen within the black. I watched the bird for 5-10 minutes. It did not feed on the ground but flew from low bush to low bush about 50 cm from the ground. At one time I saw it go down into a dead bush and catch what seemed to be a stick insect which it appeared to break up and eat.

On reporting the sighting to the observatory I was told that Mrs Rita Watkins (former co-warden at Eyre) had reported seeing a Sandstone Shrike-thrush near the observatory earlier in the year. I rang Mrs Watkins and she said they had seen 3-4 birds at Quarry Beach (several kilometres north of the observatory) in early August 1996. They saw Sandstone Shrike-thrushes at the Bungle Bungles later in their trip and felt that they looked the same as the birds they saw near Broome.

As all writers that I am familiar with say this bird is found only in sandstone, cliffy areas and feeds almost entirely on the ground, these sightings at Broome would be quite remarkable if confirmed and warrant further investigation. I was unable to do this as I had to leave Broome later in the day. I hope to solve the mystery next time I go to Broome.

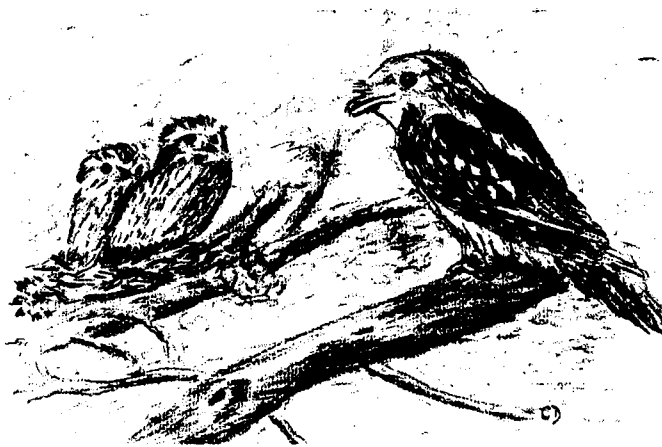
Tom Delaney

TAWNY FROGMOUTH FAMILY IN A GARDEN NEAR ALBANY

Since three cats have disappeared from the western end of Goode Beach, bird activity has increased and several species have successfully reared families. A pair of Magpie-larks have raised two chicks, and some Brown Quail are raising their second brood of eight. But of great interest to us has been a Tawny Frogmouth family which we have been able to observe at close quarters.

In the second week of September 1996, Vic Smith, who is actively involved in bird banding in this part of the country, noticed a Tawny Frogmouth nesting in a tree bordering his drive. He kept the nest under observation, which was not difficult as it could be clearly seen from his kitchen window, and after 29 days two downy, white chicks had hatched.

I first photographed the chicks on 17 October. The mother, who had become used to us observing her, sat on the nest until darkness came. The father, a slightly smaller bird, always roosted in a tree not far away and became stick-like if approached. The mother left the nest when darkness fell in search of food, and at intervals of five or ten minutes both parents took turns returning to the nest to feed the chicks.



Tawny Frogmouth with two chicks
at Goode Beach.
Drawn by Charlie Davies

A week later, on 24 October, when Vic and I next photographed them, the chicks were showing signs of colour. At the end of the month they were fully coloured and almost as big as their parents, and ten days later they were exercising their wings and taking short flights, floating effortlessly into higher branches of their nest tree. On the 8th the nest was empty, and for the next ten days the family roosted together in trees within 100 m of the nest site.

Charlie Davies

PELAGIC TRIP TO ASHMORE REEF

In October 1996, I participated in a six-day pelagic trip from Broome to Ashmore Reef and back aboard the 72 ft vessel 'Jodi Anne II'. There were ten participants and three crew. The trip was organised by Tony Palliser (who runs the Sydney pelagic trips) to coincide with the expected migration of seabirds from the NW Pacific to the Indian Ocean via the seas between Australia and Indonesia, and to see species rarely recorded in Australian waters such as Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel and Bulwer's Petrel in particular. The other participants included Mike Carter who organises the Victorian pelagic trips and Peter Milburn who now organises the Wollongong trips.

We left Broome port at 9 am on 10 October. The weather was fine and hot for the whole trip, but there was a strong land/sea breeze which made the conditions slightly uncomfortable when near the coast between Broome and the Lacepede Islands. We saw our first pelagic species (a Wilson's Storm-Petrel) while Cable Beach was still in sight. The first day was spent in comparatively shallow water up to 50 m. The water depth was to prove a very important factor. We had excellent views of three Humpback Whales that were migrating south after calving off the Kimberley coast, and sea snakes were quite common on the surface. Wilson's Storm-Petrels were fairly common and in the early afternoon one was accompanied by a Leach's Storm-Petrel (larger than Wilson's with a forked tail). This was our first major rarity (I believe that there have only been five or six previous Australian records). The wind was strong enough that we could turn off the engines and sail, and we passed west of the Lacepede Islands at about 8 pm and continued all night towards our first destination of Scott Reef.

We awoke at first light shortly after 5 am well out to sea

