

Western Australian Bird Notes

Quarterly Newsletter of Birds Australia - WA Group
(a division of Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union)

No 82 June 1997

REDSHANK REVELRY

On Friday 25 April 1997, members of "Waterbird Identification for Absolute Beginners" (a four-week course I gave for residents of Busselton) were treated to a very special bird — a Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* — feeding on top of partially submerged islets (built by tube worms of the family Serpulidae) in the Vasse Estuary opposite Estuary View Drive, Wonnerup.

While I was guiding participants through the finer points of darters, cormorants and ducks, one of the group, Mrs Edna Moore, who lives opposite, was asking me, "What is that little grey bird over there?" I reassured Edna that we would "get to that later" assuming she was referring to one of several Greenshanks in the vicinity. When I finally turned to the 'little grey bird' (appreciably smaller than the nearby Greenshanks) and saw brightly coloured legs, my immediate thought was "Terek" and this would have been rewarding enough. But they weren't yellow-orange legs they were orange-red! And so was the base of the bill, which was straight not upturned; also, the bird was larger than a Terek Sandpiper and the dimensions were all wrong! A Redshank!

This was the first Common Redshank I had seen since the Shetlands in 1978 and was enormously exciting to find in this part of the world. Redshanks breed in northern Eurasia, mainly between 40° and 60° latitude. In the East Asian-Australasian

'hemisphere' they normally migrate as far south as Indonesia, with a few vagrants to the north-west coast of Australia. There is only one previous record of a Common Redshank south of Carnarvon (in Western Australia) and that was a single bird seen at Creery Island (Peel Inlet) by John Blyth, Roger Jaensch and others on 10 July 1985 (Jaensch & Blyth 1988).

Coincidentally John Blyth was coming down to Busselton the following day to join an RAOU Anzac weekend outing in the Busselton area. On the Sunday morning at 8:30 am, 15 of us descended with binoculars, telescopes and tripods on Estuary View Drive and searched again. Yes, it was still there and all had reasonable, though not close, views of it searching energetically for food on the 1-3 m diameter islands and making short flights from one to the next.

At the time of writing (30 April), I have made two further visits (on 28th and 29th) and saw the bird again on the second occasion. On every occasion the bird has been at least 90 m (measured off aerial photograph) from us and it has not been possible to confidently describe its plumage other than to say it is grey/brown above with dark streaking on the otherwise pale neck, breast and flanks. The diagnostic broad white trailing edge to the wing and the white back and rump are very conspicuous in flight (Spotted Redshanks lack the white trailing edge to the wing, and have a longer, slightly



Common Redshank at Vasse Estuary
Drawn by Jo Taylor

downturned bill). A local artist, Jo Taylor, has kindly provided the accompanying sketch. We will also keep trying to get a close look at its plumage, with the aim of confidently ageing it.

With luck, our Redshank could remain in the area until winter rains begin, rivers run and the "estuary" water level rises, submerging the islands (the Vasse estuary now functions as a lake due to floodgates preventing seawater incursion). Once the islands are covered the bird will need to move elsewhere to find suitable feeding habitat.

If anyone is thinking of coming down to see our special visitor, ring (08) 9752 1677 or fax (08) 9752 1432 me and I will be happy to let you know when and where it was last sighted.

Reference:

Jaensch, R. & Blyth, J. 1988. A Redshank at Peel Inlet and a review of its status in Western Australia. *Western Australian Naturalist*, 17: 106-9.

Jim Lane

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.

Few sightings have been submitted this time, but the list includes two very exciting reports - a **Common Redshank** on the Vasse Estuary (details elsewhere in this issue) and a **Yellow Wagtail** at McLarty - both second records for the south-west.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Northern Shoveler - 1, apparently a first year male, 16/2/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JD, TK, CD (details in next issue)

Grey Teal - 14 adults, and 2 adults with 11 ducklings, 19/11/96, Lake Negri, Rottnest Island - IS (few breeding records from Rottnest)

Pink-eared Duck - 2 adults plus several young, 10/96, Manning Lake, Spearwood (Cockburn) - JA

Flesh-footed Shearwater - 3000, 4/5/97, off North Mole (Fremantle) - JD (increasing late April - early May, with maximum numbers on 4/5/97)

The following seabirds were reported from Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton), between 1/11/96 and 31/1/97: **White-headed Petrel** (late records), **Yellow-nosed Albatross**, **Soft-plumaged Petrel** (late records), **Great-winged Petrel**, **White-chinned Petrel**, **Grey Petrel**, **Kerguelen Petrel**,

Flesh-footed Shearwater, **Australasian Gannet**, **Arctic Jaeger**, **Great Skua** - RP

Nankeen Night Heron - 6, 21/2/97, Esplanade, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS

Glossy Ibis - 5, 20/4/97, Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CNe* 8, 25/4/97, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) - JD

Royal Spoonbill - 1, 1/2/97, Carine Swamp (Stirling) - CNe * 1, 6/4/97, Creery wetlands (Mandurah) - MS

Osprey - 1, 8/3/97, Cottesloe (Cottesloe) - IS * 1, 9/3/97, Fremantle Harbour (Fremantle) - IS

Black-shouldered Kite - 2 juvs/imms, 31/3/97, Lake Monger (Vincent) - IS

Collared Sparrowhawk - 1, 8/2/97, Hampden Road, Nedlands (Nedlands) - FO

Little Eagle - 1, 31/3/97, Cottesloe (Cottesloe) - IS

Buff-banded Rail - 1, 4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JD (unusual at McLarty - possibly first record here)

Baillon's Crake - 1, 9/2/97, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) - MS

Spotless Crake - 4, 9/2/97, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) - MS * 9, 8/3/97, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) - FO, LH * ca. 30, 20/4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JD (odd birds at McLarty from mid-Feb, with marked peak (ca 30 birds) on 20/4/97; numbers dropped to ca. 8 on 27/4/97)

Wood Sandpiper - 2, 27/4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) JD (late date)

Great Knot - 2, 27/4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - JD (unusual at McLarty - possibly first record here)

Sanderling - 42+, 22/11/96, Pearse Lakes, Rottnest Island - IS

Long-toed Stint - 2 in breeding plumage, 27/4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) JD (late date)

Pectoral Sandpiper - 8, 20/4/97 and 2+, 27/4/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) JD (late date)

Black-winged Stilt - 1 immature, 4-5/4/97, Lake Herschel and Garden Lake, Rottnest Island - CC, KK (unusual on Rottnest)

Greater Sand Plover - 6, 28/2/97, Halls Head, Mandurah (Mandurah) - IS

Hooded Plover - 2, 5/4/97, Cooloongup (Rockingham) - CNe * 2, 18/4/97, 14 km NE of Fitzgerald on Fitzgerald Road (Ravensthorpe) - BN, SM, AB * 1, 18/4/97, 8 km NW of Newdegate on Lake Bidy Road (Lake Grace) - BN, SM, AB

Banded Lapwing - 6 adults and 6 juveniles, 1/12/96; 10, 16/3/97; 11, 25/4/97, all at Rous Head, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS

Pomarine Jaeger - 8-12 (including 2 with almost fully developed tails), 3/5/97, off North Mole (Fremantle) - JD

Arctic Jaeger - 8-10+, 25/4/97, North Mole, Fremantle (Fremantle) - IS; * 1 on 29/4/97 and 2 on 4/5/97, North Mole, Fremantle (Fremantle) - JD

Crested Tern - 500-600 adults and 250+ chicks, 18/11/96 - 22/11/96, islets in Lake Baghdad, Rottnest Island - IS

Common Tern - 1 (or 2), 28/2/97, Halls Head, Mandurah (Mandurah) - IS (detailed description available)

Fairy Tern - 43, 20/11/96, Pearse Lakes, Rottnest Island - IS

Crested Pigeon - 2, 19/2/97, Busselton (Busselton) - GM

Budgerigar - "several flights", 3/97, Australind (Harvey) - GE

Elegant Parrot - ca. 50, 15/2/97, Old Bunbury Road, S of Pinjarra, between S-W Hwy and Paulls Road (Murray) - IS

Yellow Wagtail - 1, 11/3/97, Lake McLarty (Murray) - LH (description supplied)

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

Princess Parrot - 1, 5/97, Shay Gap (East Pilbara) - TF

KIMBERLEY

Grey Falcon - 1, 5/4/97, near Broome (Broome) - BBO

Black Falcon - 1 probable, 19/6/96, Airfield Swamp, Mitchell Plateau (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - CN, WN (NB: Observers should note that Brown Falcons in this area can be very dark and easily confused with Black Falcons)

Red-chested Button-quail - 1, 22/3/97, Argyle diamond mine (Wyndham - East Kimberley) - FO

possible **Spotted Redshank** - 1, 26/12/95, Roebuck Bay (Broome) - PC (detailed description supplied; also submitted to RAC)

Asian Dowitcher - 27, many in breeding plumage, 13/4/97, Broome area (Broome) - BBO

Franklin's Gull - 1, 29/12/96-1/1/97, Broome rubbish dump (Broome) - GS, BBO (description supplied)

Oriental Cuckoo - 1, 5/3/97, Broome area (Broome) - BBO

Barking Owl - 1, 15/4/97, Broome area (Broome) - BBO

Crested Bellbird - 1, 17/3/97, Roebuck Plains (Broome) - BBO (very few records from the Broome area)

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Reports have been received (without details) of two **White Wagtails** on 17/3/97, a possible **Brown Shrike** on 17/3/97, and 15 **Asian House Martins** at the airport, 12-22/3/97.

OBSERVERS

AB = Allan Burbidge	JA = Jude Allan
BBO = Broome Bird Observatory	JD = John Darnell
BN = Brenda Newbey	KK = Ken Kennedy
CC = Caroline Comstock	LH = Les Harris
CD = Colin Davis	MS = Marcus Singor
CN = Clive Napier	PC = Peter Collins
CNe = Clive Nealon	RP = Ross Payton
FO = Frank O'Connor	SM = Shapelle McNee
GE = Graeme Edwards	TF = Tony Friend
GM = G.F. Mees	TK = Tony Kirkby
IS = Ian Stranding	WN = Wendy Napier

Letters to the Editors

The last issue of *WA Bird Notes* (No 81, page 13) contained observations by Burbidge *et al* on a Barn Swallow and Tree Martins which were flying through the spray of water coming from a leaking pipe.

This aerial bathing, which may also include drinking, has also been observed in the White-backed Swallow, at Geraldton in 1969 (Stranger. 1970. Aerial bathing by White-backed Swallows. *Western Australian Naturalist Club*. 11: 145.

Interested readers should also refer to Dow, D.D. 1970. Avian Bathing Behaviour. *Western Australian Naturalist*. 11:

184), who discusses such and similar bathing by birds more extensively and also lists many references.

Burbidge *et al* also referred to observations by others of Barn Swallows apparently drinking from a dam, but didn't elaborate. This raises questions such as: were they drinking while in flight? Hovering? Or on the ground?

The Tree Martin is a species which can scoop up water from the surface of a dam while in flight, for instance, and I witnessed this behaviour several times in 1968 at the dam which used to supply water to Banksiadale, that site now being under the waters of the South Dandalup Dam. The Banksiadale Dam has since been breached.

R H Stranger

WA Group Reports

BIRDS AUSTRALIA-WA GROUP COMMITTEE

The 1997 Committee has been elected/appointed and its members are:

	Tel
Chairman: Clive Napier	9332 7265
Vice Chair: Clive Nealon	9448 5921
Treasurer: Ms Jane Venter	9330 2862
Secretary: Mrs Margaret Philippon	9375 2068
Members:	
Ms Sue Abbotts (<i>Excursions</i>)	9444 1607
Max Bailey (<i>Office Manager</i>)	9444 7920
Mike Bamford (<i>Conservation</i>)	9309 3671
John Blyth (<i>Joint Editor, WA Bird Notes</i>)	9381 6293
Bryan Barrett (<i>Excursions</i>)	9457 2335
Bill McRoberts (<i>Excursions</i>)	9459 1971
Rod Smith (<i>WABN Distribution</i>)	9447 3804

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 Birding Australia-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:

Birds on Farms Project — just when it was thought that funds for this project were exhausted, the Main Roads Department has contracted the group for surveys of road verges, with Brenda Newbey continuing as the liaison officer. It is also possible that the Gordon Reid Foundation for Conservation will provide a two-year grant for wider surveys.

Survey of Suburban Birds Project — being progressed by Clive Nealon, with follow-up letters planned to participants who have not continued to send in reports.

Birding Sites Around Perth Revised Edition — now at the printers and expected to be launched on 1 September at Perry House by the Governor (see Publications Report below for more details).

Swan/Canning Basin survey — this is a possible new project for participation by members and an application for funding has been made to the National Heritage Trust.

Proposed calendar of events in the bird world — deferred pending contributions by members.

Remote area field trip — deferred.

Provision of scholarships for university students — Mike Bamford has put together a proposal for two scholarships of \$300 each for two students to attend a course at Eyre and Broome Bird Observatories, as a way of encouraging professional interest in ornithology.

Junior ornithologists — contact is being made with several schools, seeking participants for courses, as a way of promoting ornithology among young people.

New name 'The Birds Australia Group' — this has now come into operation, with our group being known as 'Birds Australia-WA Group'.

Finances— the Committee welcomes Jane Venter as the new Treasurer, with Max Bailey to be responsible for the day-to-day finances;

— at the extraordinary general meeting held 19 March, the audited financial accounts for 1996 were presented and adopted, with the assistance of many people in their preparation following the sudden death of our previous Treasurer, Peter Anson;

— the Committee has agreed that a three-monthly income and expenditure statement be included in *WA Bird Notes* for the general information of members (see report below).

— the Committee recorded its gratitude for the efforts of Sue Clegg (Margery's daughter) and the Treasurer for installing the accounting software package that is compatible with Head Office in Melbourne, which will simplify the 'marrying' of the accounts at year-end.

Conservation — areas being monitored include Amarillo Pool at Mandurah.

Rural bird brochures — this project is continuing, with the latest one planned for the Bunbury area and another for Bridgetown.

The Chairman reported on news from *Galah* (the in-house HQ newsletter for volunteers) that the pastoral lease "Gluepot" in South Australia had been purchased by Birds Australia and that it was a sanctuary for several endangered species.

It has been planned to further improve the database program to allow more flexibility in data retrieval and to make mapping of species distribution feasible.

Darryl James, the WA Group representative at the Conservation Council, reported on Council activities and her personal role in promoting Birds Australia-WA Group views.

Clive Napier, Chairman

TREASURER'S REPORT

The following income and expenditure statement for the period 1 January to 31 March 1997 is presented for the information of members:

Cash at bank at 1/1/97 b/fwd	6,683.31
Plus Receipts	<u>4,178.55</u>
	10,861.86
Less Expenditure	
<i>WA Bird Notes</i>	1,175.43
Postages, Telephone	196.76
Functions	216.74
Bank Charges	9.62
Books	519.40
Rent	243.74
Utilities	107.05
Projects	2,847.14
Trading Expenses	88.00
Sundries	669.00
Total Expenditure	<u>6,072.88</u>
Balance of Cash at Bank	<u>\$4,788.98</u>

Jane Venter, Treasurer

PUBLICATIONS REPORT

BIRDING SITES AROUND PERTH

The revised edition of *Birding Sites Around Perth* will be launched at Perry House by the Governor of Western Australia, His Excellency Major-General Michael Jeffery AC, MC, at 10:00 am on Monday 1 September 1997.

Guests will include representatives of State and Local Government departments and company organisations which have supported the Birds Australia-WA Group in this and other projects.

It will be an opportunity to acknowledge the support of our sponsors in this and other projects and to have displays of our current activities and research projects and to publicise our Birds Australia-WA Group.

ALL MEMBERS ARE VERY WELCOME.

To assist the organisers with catering, would you please advise the office on (08) 9383 7749 if you are attending by Monday 18 August.

**Allan Jones
for Organising Sub-committee**

HERON AND EGRET SURVEY, MARCH 1997

In March the Committee received a request from Robyn Phillimore, a Masters student in environmental science, asking for help in taking a census of the population of egrets in the metropolitan area. To achieve this we mounted an operation to take place over one weekend, thereby hopefully not counting the same birds more than once. Ten members agreed to check their local wetlands on either 22nd or 23rd March. Their observations were then posted direct to the student.

To make the count more interesting, we included the three species of herons with the two species of egrets.

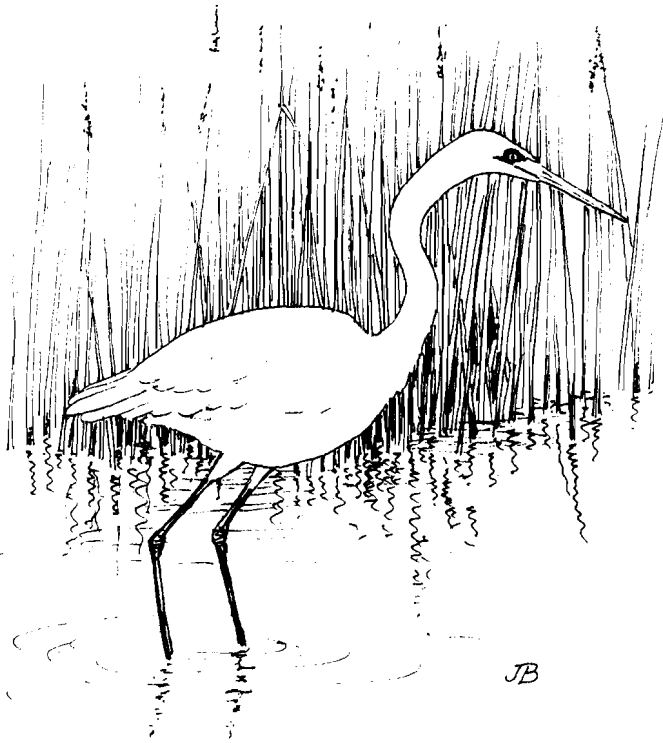
Predictably, White-faced Herons at 42, and Great Egrets at 31, were dominant whereas only seven Little Egrets were counted. The three Nankeen Night Herons reported fails to reflect their presence, since they tend to roost in inaccessible places. No White-necked Herons were reported, although 20 had been seen during January on Forrestdale Lake which is now dry.

The table on the following page shows the areas observed and birds found there.

Bryan Barrett

RESULTS, HERON AND EGRET SURVEY, MARCH 1997

Location	Weather	Date	Time	Great Egret	Little Egret	White-faced Heron	White-necked Heron	Nankeen Night Heron
Alfred Cove (Attadale)	Sunny	22 Mar 97	8:00 - 9:00 am	0	0	2	0	0
Bibra Lake	Sunny	23 Mar 97	9:30 - 11:30 am	4	0	8	0	0
Big Carine Swamp	Sunny	23 Mar 97	6:45 - 8:15 am	9	2	5	0	1
Blue Gum Lake (Mt Pleasant)	Sunny	23 Mar 97	10:20 - 10:45 am	1	0	0	0	0
Booragoon Lake	Sunny	23 Mar 97	9:45 - 10:15 am	1	0	0	0	2
Coogee Lake	Sunny, SW breeze	23 Mar 97	12:00 pm	1	2	5	0	0
Forrestdale Lake	Sunny	22 Mar 97	10:00 - 10:15 am	0	0	0	0	0
Gnangara Lake	Sunny	22 Mar 97	9:30 - 11:30 am	0	0	0	0	0
Herdsmen Lake	Sunny, windy	23 Mar 97	8:15 - 11:15 am	2	0	7	0	0
Lake Gwelup	Sunny	23 Mar 97	9:00 - 10:00 am	1	0	0	0	0
Lake Joondalup	Sunny, E wind	21 Mar 97	7:00 am - 8:00 am	8	3	5	0	0
Lake Kogolup	Sunny	22 Mar 97	10:50 am	0	0	5	0	0
Lake Monger	Sunny	23 Mar 97	7:00 am	2	0	0	0	0
Lake Yangebup	Sunny, E wind	22 Mar 97	9:30 am	1	0	3	0	0
North Lake	Sunny	23 Mar 97	11:30 am - 12:30 pm	1	0	1	0	0
Perry Lakes	Sunny	22 Mar 97	3:30 - 4:30 pm	0	0	0	0	0
Piney Lakes (Winthrop)	Sunny	22 Mar 97	11:00 am	0	0	0	0	0
Star Swamp, North Beach	Sunny	22 Mar 97	7:45 - 9:00 am	0	0	1	0	0
Thomsons Lake	Sunny	22 Mar 97	8:30 - 9:30 am	0	0	0	0	0



The Great Egret was the second most common species recorded during the Heron and Egret Survey
 Drawn by Judy Blyth

PROJECT REPORT: BIRDS ON FARMS

Despite participants finding the registration form 'intimidating', 'daunting' and 'far from easy', there are now 68 farms registered through the Birds Australia-WA Group. The goal is 90. Nationwide the goal is 250 farms. In WA, farms are widespread extending to Albany (south), Nabawa (north), Yallingup (west) and Esperance (east). Many farmers are surveying on their own properties. There has been a high level of success in finding birdwatchers for interested farmers. Several farmers only need help to start with and are giving themselves a crash course in bird identification.

Help is still needed at Ajana and Mingenew.

Although I was hoping to make the deadline for new participants the end of autumn (31 May), it has for various reasons been extended to 30 June which is the deadline selected by Geoff Barrett, national coordinator of the project, so there is still time to leap on board.

If you are registered but missed the autumn survey, try to get the winter one done.

In April, Main Roads WA agreed to participate in the project as they are interested in finding out more about bird use of their revegetated road verges. The Main Roads sites will all be half hectare sites which should be surveyed in 20 minutes. (They are called 20 Minute Sites.) I will be selecting the sites and seeking volunteers for the surveys in May and June. As for the farms involved, participation will be for a minimum of two years with each site visited once a season.

Main Roads WA is funding their participation. So far, except for one small grant (State Government, community conservation), the rest of the project in WA has been supported by the WA Group. The Group (through the efforts of Allan Jones and Clare Mercer in particular) is trying very hard to

secure outside funding.

To save duplication of effort, the survey results and site registration details are being entered into a database at the national office in Melbourne. Soon the current version of the WA data will be sent to me. Thereafter it will be updated every three or four months and some preliminary examination of the WA data can begin. We are hoping to exchange information with other Western Australian programs.

We have been in touch with Penny Hussey of CALM's Land for Wildlife program and officers from Agriculture WA from Narrogin and Albany who are responsible for large scale monitoring and will make data available to them when required.

Brenda Newbey
 WA Coordinator

WADER STUDY GROUP SUMMER SURVEY

On 15 February, 31 RAOU Members, plus volunteers at Rottnest and Walpole, took part in a coordinated wader count at 17 locations between Cervantes and Albany. This survey was organised following a request from Ken Harris on behalf of the Australian Wader Study Group, to monitor waders at the Swan Estuary Marine Park for their summer survey. It was then decided to increase the number of Western Australian sites. This was achieved thanks to the response of those RAOU members contacted, the Department of Conservation and Land Management at Walpole, Frank Pridham and the Mandurah birders, and the Rottnest Volunteer Guides. These stalwarts were on station at their allotted sites and counting started simultaneously at each of the 17 locations at the predicted time for low tide.

A total of 21 281 waders was counted and 33 different species identified (see table on next page). As would be expected, Red-necked Stints were the most reported species being seen at 11 of the 17 sites. However, the total of 2876 shows a drop in numbers compared to previous surveys (eg. 10 000 Red-necked Stints at Alfred Cove — Watkins 1993 Report). Wader numbers were also down at the Swan Estuary Marine Park where the three reserves making up the Park — Milyu, Pelican Point and Alfred Cove — reported a combined wader count of 797 birds. Observers at Alfred Cove counted 579 waders. The highest numbers were recorded at Lake McLarty with 16 species, including 35 Marsh Sandpipers (only one other site reported this species), 1024 Curlew Sandpipers, 5 Pectoral Sandpipers, 2 Long-toed Stints, and a Ruff. Also a bonus was the sighting of a Northern Shoveler by the four observers covering the lake.

Two inland sites were included in the survey resulting in 6000 Banded Stilts being observed at Flagstaff Lake (many thanks to Wayne Zadow), plus ten species at Towerinning Lake. Tagged, flagged or banded birds were not seen at any of the sites during the survey.

The Wader Study Group will be conducting another summer count in February 1998. In addition to the sites covered in the 1997 exercise, we intend to monitor all the Rottnest lakes, coastal habitats north of Cervantes, estuaries between Australind and Esperance, plus as many inland sites as possible. For this program to be a success we need more observers, particularly country members. Those contemplating surveillance of a site with slight apprehension should check the Table and note it does not have to be teeming with waders to be accepted. A habitat with two species, eg, Rous Head, is

WA WADER STUDY SURVEY, 15 February 1997

Species	Rottnest	Swan Estuary Marine Pk	Kogolup Lake	Forrest-dale Lake	Woodman Point	Cookoongup Lake	4 West Sites Mandurah	McLarty Lake	Harvey Estuary	Albany A Little Grove	Albany B Wilson Inlet	Walpole	Towerinning Lake	Flagstaff Lake	Cervantes L Thetis	Yalgonup N Pk	Rous Head Fremantle
Pied Oystercatcher		20					18					5					
Sooty Oystercatcher											*2	1					
Banded Lapwing																	9
Grey Plover		68			8		39		4	3							
Pacific Golden										18							
Red-kneed Dotterel			2					6					14				
Hooded Plover						1										10	
Large Sand Plover											2						
Red-capped Plover		84		700		97		229		3	178		115	450	18	153	3
Black-fronted Dotterel			22	1				7					74				
Black-winged Stilt		29	45	2400			98	1200			3		135			8	
Banded Stilt	850			33	1	2		21	150				2	6000		47	
Red-necked Avocet			246	210				1403			291		3		1	2	
Ruddy Turnstone	38				14					4							
Eastern Curlew							5										
Whimbrel							4										
Wood Sandpiper			2	9				4					4				
Grey-tailed Tattler					2												
Common Sandpiper							2					5					
Greenshank		12		10			21	26	5	22	34			11	3	1	
Marsh Sandpiper								35					1				
Black-tailed Godwit								24									
Bar-tailed Godwit		5					67			4							
Red Knot							50			351							
Great Knot		28															
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper		3		32			117	506			1		22				
Pectoral Sandpiper								5									
Red-necked Stint	34	526		640	2	2	451	634		16	550		9			12	
Long-toed Stint			1	1				2									
Curlew Sandpiper	4	22		50				1024			238						
Sanderling	6				8							3					
Ruff								1									
Terek Sandpiper															2		
TOTAL	932	797	318	4086	35	102	882	5127	159	421	1299	14	379	6461	24	233	12

* seen at Parry Beach

of equal value in the count to any other. So, plan an outing for next February and join Wader Watchers by filling in the form included in this newsletter and sending it to the Wader Study Survey, Perry House. You will then be contacted and informed of how you can help.

Colin Davis

PERRY HOUSE LIBRARY NEWS

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

Bulletin, Threatened Species Network No 1, November 1996

Contact Call, Newsletter, RAOU North Queensland, December 1996

Newsletter, Broome Bird Observatory, December 1996

Tree Society Review, No 4, December 1996

The Bird Observer, Bird Observers Club of Australia, Nos 768, 771, 772 and 773, October 1996, January-April 1997

River View, Swan River Trust, No 8, July/August 1996

Inner Peel Region Structure Plan, Lake Mealup Preservation Society (Inc), September 1996

G N Lord. *Birds of the West Wimmera Shire*. West Wimmera Shire Council

River Care Directory, Swan River Trust, 1996

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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 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 September 1997 Issue

1 August 1997

at Perry House

Members' Contributions

TERNS AT EYRE

October 24th, 1996 was an overcast, windy day and members of the Focus on Birds (Spring) course at Eyre Bird Observatory were travelling west along Kanidal Beach when a tern was sighted between the seaweed banks. It flew as we approached and our first impression was of a small, slim, grey tern using full but slow wing strokes, flying almost side-on into the strong south-westerly wind and keeping quite low —

just above the seaweed banks. We followed up more slowly this time and all present noticed the very pointy dark bill which quickly eliminated Caspian and Crested Terns from our list of possible species, while its size was well above that of a Fairy Tern.

As the tern became used to our presence, the pauses between moves along the beach were longer and more detailed notes were taken and confirmed by all present. Its bill was actually a very dark red as were its legs. The length of the bill was noticeably shorter than the length of the head. The black cap was receding with a noticeable white forehead and a thick black line from the cap to the front of the eye. When on the beach it appeared to have very short legs, that is, its knees were not showing, and it had no noticeable neck giving it a hunched appearance. Each time it flew a narrow, dark blackish edge, of even width and with clear cut edges, was evident along the trailing edge of its wing — both upper and lower surfaces.

There was no carpal (shoulder) bar and its wings were very long and tapered. This last observation led us to exclude the less common Antarctic Tern, which is also bulkier, with noticeable grey on the underparts of the body. We were now left with a choice between the Arctic Tern and Common Tern, neither of which are common species at Eyre. Adult birds of both of these species exhibit the uniform pale grey upper parts, with white rump and underbody, as seen on our bird. Its hunched appearance, clear-cut, dark even trailing edge to long tapering wings and its manner of flight convinced us that it was an Arctic Tern that we were looking at.

Later the same day at Twilight Cove to the west of Eyre, a large flock of 350 or more Crested Terns was observed on the beach. Birds were continuously moving in and out of the resting group. On a number of occasions an incoming bird would be just about to land when a stronger gust of wind would cause it to crash amongst the others — definitely not a dignified way for such a graceful bird to arrive.

“To see two migratory species of terns
in three days was indeed something
special.”

Two days later, as course members were preparing to depart, another tern was sighted by Doris Graham at the beach entrance of the track leading to the Observatory. After a scramble for binoculars and telescope, five people headed for the beach to follow it up. The bird was located behind the primary dune and looked very ill; that is, not really taking much notice of people, feathers in disarray and moving very unsteadily on its feet. This enabled most present to obtain good views of it. Its almost complete black cap led to the opinion that it was not the same bird that had been seen two days before. Like the Arctic Tern seen earlier, this bird was slender, had red/black bill and legs, pale grey upper parts, and white rump and underbody. However, the longer bill in relation to the length of the head, a large dark triangular area (dusky wedge) on the upper and lower wing tips, a noticeable carpal (shoulder) bar and longer legs (we could see its knees) convinced us that this was a Common Tern between breeding and non-breeding plumage. As Mavis Norgard attempted to get closer to take a photograph it took fright and flew inland until lost from view.

To see two migratory species of terns in three days was indeed something special. However, the records of Eyre Bird Observatory show that a similar event occurred in September 1984 when two Arctic Terns were sighted three days before an immature Common Tern. At least one of these species was new for most course members.

In reaching our conclusions we consulted the following references:

- Dymond, N. 1988. 'Birds' in *Eyre Bird Observatory Report No. 4* 1984/19185. RAOU Report No. 38.
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- Serventy, D. L. Serventy, V. And Warham, J. 1971. *The handbook of Australian seabirds*. A. H. And A. W. Reed, Sydney.
- Simpson, K. And Day, N. 1996. *Field Guide to the Birds of Australia*. 5th edition, Viking Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria.
- Storr, G. M. 1987. *Birds of the Eucla Division of Western Australia. Records of the Western Australian Museum — Supplement No 27*. Western Australian Museum, Perth.
- Since returning to Perth the following additional references have also been consulted:
- Higgins, P. J. And Davies, S. J. J. F. (Eds) 1996. *Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds Vol. 3 Snipe to Pigeons*. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Carter, M. And Eades, D. 1994. Bird identification: The 'commic' terns — identification of four medium sized terns. *Wingspan*. No. 16, 16-19.

NESTING DARTERS

During the campout at Lake Wilgarup, about 15 km N of Manjimup, on the weekend of March 1-3, a nesting Darters' site was discovered and visited by members of the group on several occasions.

We first saw the nests with a group of about eight people, and later returned on two occasions, when we were the only two there.



Some of the poses adopted by young Darters
in a nest at Wilgarup Swamp
Drawn by Pam Agar.

Two bulky stick nests had been built in a relatively low paperbark at the water's edge. The branches of this tree tended to spread horizontally, whereas other nearby trees grew more vertically. The nest-site was well screened on the landward side by a thick stand of mature paperbarks, flooded-gums and a red-flowering shrub (*Melaleuca* sp.). The opposite side was open to a stretch of water, with a broad band of tall reeds separating that from an even wider stretch of water beyond.

(The nests were also somewhat protected from intruders by tiger snakes!)

The lower of the two nests had been built about two metres above the water; the other, nearby, was slightly higher.

Four well-developed young, almost the size of adults, seemed to be associated with the lower nest, while the higher nest contained at least two chicks. These two were much younger than those in the lower nest, being only about half their size.

All the young were covered with thick white down and some had developed an orange-tan colouring on their necks and heads. Their legs and feet were very pale and all had developed dark wing primaries and tail feathers.

The birds were more active early in the morning and the chicks, obviously hungry, were observed with necks craned. When the female arrived, often all chicks reached up but only one chick was fed on each visit, although a second chick signaled its need by tapping at the bill of the adult. The chick receiving the food thrust its bill deep within the throat of the adult bird, and the two performed an awkward jiggling movement as the adult regurgitated a meal. When the chick was satisfied, the adult moved to a nearby perch to rest briefly, before leaving again, often by dropping directly into the water below the perch.

The male bird visited the nest on more than one occasion but was not seen to feed the young.

Later in the morning, with appetites apparently satisfied, the young were more relaxed and spent their time preening, hunching drowsily in the nest, stretching half-developed wings or clumsily exploring the nearby branches. The nest site was completely exposed from above and as the day grew hotter, the young were seen with bills open, panting, and fluttering the skin below the lower bill, in an attempt to cool themselves.

Despite the fact that the only view available was from about ten metres away (making it necessary to use binoculars), and largely obscured by paperbark trunks, I spent a pleasant hour attempting to capture the poses of the young birds. Some of the results are included.

Pam Agar

MIMICRY IN HONEYEATERS

In the last issue of WABN, Bruce Buchanan described very interesting observations concerning vocal mimicry by a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater at Wannamal (WABN 81: 1-2). As noted in the article, such behaviour is unusual. In fact, mimicry in honeyeaters is very rare. The two species in which it is best developed are the Regent Honeyeater and Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater (Veerman 1992 and references therein). Most instances of mimicry in these species involve the calls of larger species (particularly wattlebirds) and Veerman (1994) discusses possible explanations of this behaviour. He suggests that the benefit to the mimic is in reducing competition for food by reducing possible aggression by larger honeyeaters or enhancing territorial defence against smaller competitors.

The Wannamal example appears to fit this explanation, except that it appears also to involve a certain degree of co-operation between a Spiny-cheeked Honeyeater and Little Wattlebird.

Thanks to Stephen Debus for bringing the Regent Honeyeater studies to our attention.

References:

- Buchanan, B. 1997. Cooperation between honeyeater species. *Western Australian Bird Notes* 81, 1-2.
- Veerman, P.A. 1992. Vocal mimicry of larger honeyeaters by the Regent Honeyeater. *Australian Bird Watcher* 14, 180-189.
- Veerman, P.A. 1994. Batesian acoustic mimicry by the Regent Honeyeater. *Australian Bird Watcher* 15, 250-259.

Allan Burbidge

TAWNY FROGMOUTHS: CORRECTION

In an article on Frogmouths in the last issue (WABN 81,8) it was stated that the smaller of the pair (assumed to be a male) incubated at night and the larger bird (assumed to be a female) incubated during the day. This is consistent with Hollands (1991). However, this is incorrect. In frogmouths it is in fact the male which is larger, and the female smaller, as described by Schodde and Mason (1980), based on dissection of museum specimens.

References:

- Hollands, D. 1991. *Birds of the Night: Owls, Frogmouths and Nightjars of Australia*. Reed Books Pty Lrd, Balgowlah, NSW.
- Schodde, R. and Mason, I. J. 1980. *Nocturnal Birds of Australia*. Lansdowne Editions, Melbourne.

Editors

A BIRD WALK IN GAME VALLEY NATURE RESERVE: AN AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Game Valley Nature Reserve, about 25 km from Pietermaritzburg, capital of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, lies in the Karkloof Valley, a tributary of the Mngeni (Umgeni) River which reaches the sea at Durban, about 150 km away. The reserve's habitats vary from dense evergreen forest to deciduous savanna (mainly the Paperbark *Acacia sieberana*) and some open grassland. There is also some riverine and marshland vegetation. The woodland trees include the Cabbage Tree *Cussonia spicata*. There is unfortunately some invasion by alien weeds, but the indigenous plants include some pretty native blooms, such as the Christmas Bells *Sandersonia aurantiaca*.

On a breezy Sunday at the end of November 1996 I joined a birdwalk at Game Valley, led by Professor Gordon Maclean, author of the Fifth and Sixth Editions of *Roberts' birds of southern Africa*, the region's definitive handbook. He had given us a very interesting talk during his visit to Perth in October 1996. There were ten other people on the birdwalk which began at 6:30 am after coffee and muffins, and finished at about 11:30 am after tea and delicious snacks which were included in the ZAR45.00 (Aus\$12.85). While waiting to depart from the main lodge, Lesser Striped Swallows, a Rameron Pigeon, Tambourine Dove and a nesting Dusky Flycatcher were seen.

The vegetation was very green as the normal summer rains had been falling for over two months after an unusually wet winter. We set off in an open-sided transport which could seat about 20 people. Zeff, Gordon's assistant (an African game