

Western Australian Bird Notes

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

No 93 March 2000

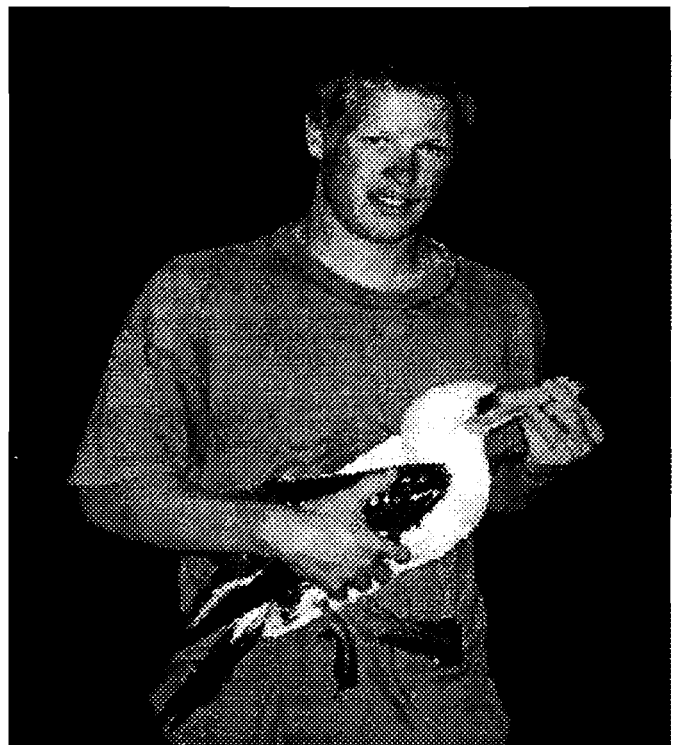
ABBOTT'S BOOBY: FIRST RECORD FOR WA

On Friday 17 December 1999 a phone call was made to Broome Bird Observatory about a strange bird, possibly an albatross, sitting in a tree at Eco Beach Holiday Resort. From the first description given, I managed to identify the bird as being a booby and, with lots of white on the bird, most likely a Masked Booby. Dan O'Sullivan, the fisherman who found the bird, said that he was familiar with Masked Boobies but this just didn't look right.

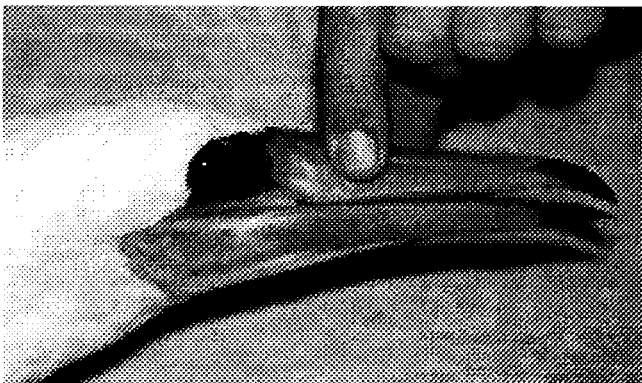
I then started thinking of other possibilities.

Over the past few days two tropical cyclones, John and Ilsa, had moved towards the North West of Australia, having originated near Christmas Island. I explained to Dan that as a long shot it could be the rare and endangered Abbott's Booby, which as far as I knew hadn't yet been recorded on the Australian mainland. Due to the cyclone having originated near Christmas Island, where the sole population of these boobies live, the chances of the bird being this species increased dramatically.

I asked Dan if he could have a closer look at the bird and see if it had a black tail, all black wings and blue feet.



Adrian Boyle holding the Abbott's Booby that turned up at Broome.



Head of Abbott's Booby at Broome
Photograph by Adrian Boyle

He came back to the phone sounding very excited, answering "Yes" to all of the above questions.

I replied that I might see him there in a minute! I picked up Chris Hassell and we headed out to Eco Beach.

As soon as we saw the booby there was no mistaking what it was — no other bird has those markings. The bird was an adult male Abbott's Booby. We took loads of

See page 26 for Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting

photographs and Dan showed us how the bird eats the live fish he had caught.

The bird was in great condition considering where it had just been blown from — it just needed to put on some weight and it would be fine. Because Dan was a fisherman, this seemed the ideal place for an Abbott's Booby to be blown ashore!

The booby was looked after well and was flown back to Christmas Island on Christmas Eve.

I am sure it was a Christmas that the booby will never forget.

Adrian Boyle
Assistant Warden
Broome Bird Observatory



Abbott's Booby at Broome
Photograph by Adrian Boyle

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.

SOUTH-WEST (Shark Bay to Cape Arid)

Southern Fulmar – 1, 8/11/99, beachwashed at Eyre (Dundas) – EBO

Blue Petrel – 1, beachwashed, 26/8/99, 4 km W of Guilderton (Gingin) – CR (clearly identifiable from photos of dead bird)

White-chinned Petrel – 3, 13/10/99, Point Dalling, Dunsborough (Busselton) – RP

Australasian Gannet – 2, 3/1/00, Geraldton (Geraldton) – DC

White-necked Heron – 1, Gibb Road Swamp (Armadale), 6 on Thomson's Lake (Cockburn) and 3 on Twin Bartram Swamp, all observed within a few hours of each other on 28/12/99 – MaB, MBa

Buff-banded Rail – 3 adults and 2 chicks, 11/1/00, Kogolup Lake (Cockburn) – MS

Red-necked Phalarope – 1, 3/11/99, Rottneest Island – IS * 1, 30/1/00, Rottneest Island – CN

Pacific Golden Plover – 5, 19/12/99, Woodman Point (Cockburn) – MS

Little Ringed Plover – 1, 21/11/99, Pearse Lakes & Government House Lake, Rottneest Island – FO

Lesser Sand Plover – 2, 19/3/99, Woodman Point (Cockburn) – IS * 1, 21/11/1999, Pearse Lakes Rottneest Island – FO

Hooded Plover – 41, 23/12/99, Pink Lake (Esperance) – DC

Pacific Gull – 1 immature, 30/1/00, Dawesville Cut (Murray) – BG

Franklin's Gull – 1, 3-4/1/00, Kalbarri (Northampton) – DC (details elsewhere in this issue)

Gull-billed Tern – 40+ adults, several downy dependent young, some adults apparently brooding, 13/11/99, Durdebin Farm (31° 23' 18", 117° 22' 38"), approx 30-35 km NE of Cunderdin, on a small island in salt lake in farmland (Cunderdin) – CG, MG * 2, 18/1/00, Herdsman Lake (Stirling) – MaB, MBa

Fairy Tern – 10, 28/12/99, Pelican Point (Nedlands) – MaB, MBa (presence here not unusual, but courtship behaviour and copulation were observed)

Crested Pigeon – 3, 17/11/99, and 2, 25/11/99, near sewer plant, Anniebrook (Busselton) – RP

Cockatiel – 200, 31/12/00, Bodallin, near Southern Cross (Yilgarn) – HK per BN

Purple-crowned Lorikeet – about 3, early Sep 99, Cataby (Dandaragan) – MBa (unusual in this area)

Regent Parrot – 7, 31/12/99, Vasse (Busselton) – RP (further south than normal for this species on the west coast)

Barking Owl – 1, 6/6/99, Julimar Conservation Park (Toodyay) – JD

Rainbow Bee-eater – c. 40, 1845 hrs on 8/2/00, Lancaster St, Dianella (Stirling) – RD (flock, spiralling and circling higher and higher, before heading off northwards; possible early departures for warmer climes?)

Striated Pardalote – 200+ in a flock, c. 1400 hrs, 21/1/00, Christmas Tree Well, Brookton Highway (Beverly) – RD (flock settled for a few minutes in the

trees around the well before all moving off again, heading north, twittering persistently)

Crimson Chat – 3 +, 17/10/99, Valema Farms, approx 12 km WSW of Corrigin (at 32° 23' 25", 117° 42' 38") – (Corrigin) CG, MG (further south than usual).

Southern Scrub-robin – 1, 4/10/99, 70 km NE of Wubin (Perenjori) – MC

Grey Currawong – 1+, 31/1/00, Karanga Street, Falcon (adjacent to W side of Peel Inlet) (Murray) – AHB, MBa (unusual in this area)

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

Freckled Duck – 2, 2/11/99, Lake Gregory (Halls Creek) – JS

Laughing Turtle-Dove – 1+, 5/1/00, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) – DC

Grey Honeyeater – 2 plus fledgling, 26/10/99, 7 km W of Yalgoo (Yalgoo) – FO * 1, 27/10/99, Nallan Station, near Cue (Cue) – FO

Yellow Wagtail – 1, 5/1/00, Chinaman's Pool, Carnarvon (Carnarvon) – DC (details elsewhere in this issue; this is only the second record between the Pilbara and the south-west)

KIMBERLEY

Green Pygmy-goose – 2, 31/12/1999, Wandarrie sewage ponds (Argyle Diamond Mine) (Wyndham-East Kimberley) – FO (1st sighting here since September 1994)

Garganey – 1, 28/11/99, wetland north of Broome (Broome) – CH, AB (first record for 7 years)

Buff-banded Rail – 1, 16/01/00, Junction Pool (Broome) – BBO/AB

Spotless Crake – 1, 4/12/1999, Nimilaica (Broome) – BBO/AB

Gallinago snipe – up to 4, all months, Broome Sewage Works and wetlands (Broome) – CH, AB

Pectoral Sandpiper – 1, 27/12/99, Junction Pool (Broome) – CH, AB (uncommon near Broome)

Banded Lapwing – 1, 30/9/99, Broome Port (Broome) – PJ

Roseate Tern – up to 20, Nov-Dec 99, Broome Port (Broome) – CH (uncommon near Broome)

Little Tern – 12/99 – 1/00, nesting, Coconut Well (Broome) – BBO/AB

Common Noddy – 3, 16/12/99, Broome Port (Broome) – CH, AB (rare on mainland at Broome)

Flock Bronzewing – 1, 8/11/99, Taylors Lagoon (Broome) – CH, AB (rare near Broome)

Shining Bronze-Cuckoo – 1, 2/1/00, near Argyle Diamond Mine Village (Wyndham-East Kimberley) – FO (rare passage migrant - very few records for Kimberley; also new species for Argyle – URRF submitted for Atlas)

Common Koel – 1, 11/11/1999, near Leonard George (Broome) – BBO/AB * 3+ (1seen, 2+ heard), 31/12/1999, Limestone sewage ponds, Argyle Diamond Mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) – FO

Fork-tailed Swift – 200, 11/11/99, near Tunnel Creek (Derby – West Kimberley) – CH, AB (first for season)

Purple-crowned Fairy-wren – 5, 12/11/99, Fitzroy Crossing (Derby – West Kimberley) – CH, AB (west edge of range)

Western Gerygone – 1, 17/11/1999, caught in mist net at Cable Beach (Broome) – BBO/AB (rare non-breeding visitor from the south)

Orange Chat – 4+, 1/11/99, near Lake Gregory (Halls Creek) – JS (at northern limit – see article elsewhere in this issue)

Yellow Chat – 30, 27/12/99, bore on Roebuck Plains (Broome) – CH, AB

White-browed Robin – 1, 12/11/99, Fitzroy Crossing (Derby – West Kimberley) – CH, AB (west edge of range)

Star Finch – 2, 31/12/99, *Typha* reeds along watercourse near Argyle Diamond Mine (Wyndham-East Kimberley) – FO (new species for Argyle list)

Pictorella Mannikin – 14, 11/11/99, south of Tunnel Creek (Derby – West Kimberley) – CH, AB

Barn Swallow – up to 2500, 20/01/00, Roebuck Plains (Broome) – BBO/AB

Red-rumped Swallow – c. 100, 12/99, near Kununurra (Wyndham-East Kimberley) – MT, GG, ANS *et al.* (specimen identified as *japonica*) * 1, 20/12/99, wetland north of Broome (Broome) – CH, AB (first

Broome record for 8 yrs) (see details elsewhere in this issue)

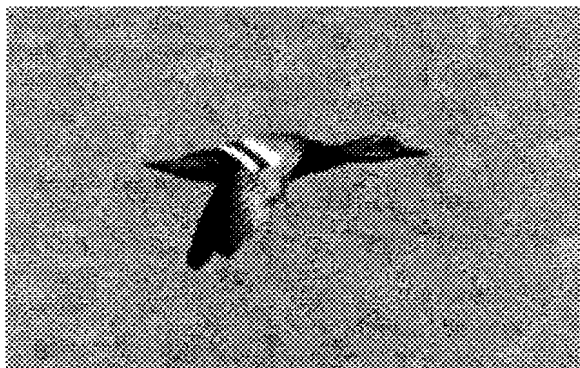
CHRISTMAS ISLAND

Red-rumped Swallow – 3 with 4 Barn Swallows, 18/11/99 – MCa, PC

OBSERVERS

AB = Adrian Boyle
AHB = Allan Burbidge
ANS = Tony Start
BBO = Broome Bird Observatory
BG = Bob Goodale
BN = Brenda Newbey
CG = Cheryl Gole
CH = Chris Hassell
CN = Clive Napier
CR = Chris Ros
DC = David Cooper
EBO = Eyre Bird Observatory
FO = Frank O'Connor
GG = Gordon Graham
HK = H. Kent

IS = Ian Standing
JD = John Dell
JS = Jonny Schoenjahn
MaB = Mandy Bamford
MBa = Mike Bamford
MC = Margery Clegg
McA = Mike Carter
MG = Martin Gole
MS = Marcus Singor
MT = Michael Todd
PC = Peter Crabtree
PJ = Phil Joy
RD = Rob Davis
RP = Ross Payton



Garganey seen near Broome in Nov 1999

Photo by Adrian Boyle

BIRDS AUSTRALIA RARITIES COMMITTEE (BARC)

BARC, chaired by Tony Palliser, assesses reports of national rarities. In the last few months, the following Western Australian cases have been accepted, and are listed below for the information of local members. The format is case number, common name, scientific name, location, date.

240 Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* Broome, WA, 23/1/98

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sirs

A plea through you to the powers that be, to allow bird-lovers to remove feral 'laughing' kookaburras from the south-west. They are helping feral cats and foxes to decimate indigenous wildlife in some areas, and the mad CALM policy is to fine the good people who manage to get rid of any of these nasty predators against which our lovely wrens, robins, lizards, etc, have no defence.

It's time to act.

LF

Dear Sirs

On 16 January, we observed a Black-shouldered Kite at the top of a tree on Penguin Island. The kite had caught a young Bridled Tern and was trying to pluck it while swaying around in the top of the tree. Its task was made very awkward as it was being mobbed by Silver Gulls and Bridled Terns. Eventually, the kite dropped its victim and flew off.

Bob Clayson and Mike Potter
Members of RSPB in UK

WA Group Reports

BIRDS AUSTRALIA – 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 Birds 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:

Proposal to incorporate — following a public notice placed in *The West Australian* on 3 November 1999, the application and draft constitution have been lodged with

the Ministry for Fair Trading and advice is awaited from this department.

Atlas of Australian Birds #2 Project — see separate supplement for report from the WA coordinator, Cheryl Gole.

Suburban Bird Survey — continuing, with an estimated 250 000 records now entered in the database.

Education/Public Relations:

- National Bird Week — public walks took place on 27 October at Wireless Hill, led by Allan and Rose Jones,

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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 MSWord format; a style sheet is available from Perry House to guide writers regarding format
- WABN uses Birds Australia recommended English names
- except for Observations, contributions will be published unless the contributor is informed to the contrary.
- the full Editorial Policy is stated in WABN 74:10-12

Deadline for the June 2000 Issue
1 May 2000 at Perry House

Advertising Rates

1/4 page	\$30.00
1/2 page	\$50.00
Full page	\$90.00

and on 31 October at Perry House led by John and Judy Blyth.

- displays were prepared for the Birds on Farms report launch on 24 November and the Donnybrook Library resource centre;
- during November, Judy gave talks at the Selby Recreation Centre and to Wider Vision, a group in Scarborough, with a slide show of local birds.

New Members' Night, 15 November — about 31 members attended and received information on WA projects and activities.

Grants Sub-committee — the sub-committee continues to submit applications for funding of projects including —

- State Government Community Grant jointly with CALM for a Biological Resources Survey of Salt-affected Areas of the WA Wheatbelt, in conjunction with the Atlas Project, Coordinator Cheryl Gole;
- Carnaby's Black-Cockatoo project with applications to (1) Gordon Reid Foundation — to establish a survey of Carnaby's breeding sites 2000 season and (2) National Heritage Trust (jointly with CALM) — continuation of GRF survey (2001-02) — monitoring breeding 2001-02; encouraging protection of breeding sites, feeding habitats;
- Clean Seas grant (NHT) \$65 000 — a joint project of BAWAG and TSN being a continuation of the Hooded Plover project, with one survey proposed for the summer and one for the winter;
- Ground Parrot program — the final survey will be carried out at Cape Arid in May and the brochure is being prepared by Shapelle McNee.

Ken Hurst Park Committee — Clive Napier is our delegate to this committee which will be preparing a plan for the public use of this area in Melville as a nature reserve.

Trading Table — Valerie Hemsley and Clive Nealon are coordinating sales of bird cards, and Liz Walker has been looking after sales of field guides, books, CDs, etc.

Positions of Office Manager and Librarian — Liz Walker has very kindly offered to take over as Office Manager from Max Bailey as from 1 March. This leaves a vacancy for the Librarian position and Sue Mather is stepping into the job for which she is admirably suited, having been a librarian during her career years.

Database of WA Birds ("DABWA") — this has been a dBase program since inception. The Committee feels it's time to have it converted to MS Access to facilitate use by the Perry House volunteers and a consultant has been commissioned for this purpose.

Excursions — see *Coming Events* for summary for the next quarter.

GST — the National Office is setting up procedures to be followed by the regional groups.

Unusual sightings "Bush Telegraph" — Sue Abbotts is coordinating the setting up of a system to enhance the reporting of unusual sightings and to improve the dissemination of information — see item under Notices for details.

Annual General Meeting, 28 February — we will have at least two vacancies on the 2000 Committee and trust

that by the time this newsletter is received, new officebearers will have been appointed.

Clive Nealon
WA Group Chairman

LIBRARY REPORT

The following publications have been accessioned since the last report:

- Draft Regional Assessment of the Central Wheatbelt, August 1999
- CALM Annual Report, 1998-9
- *Flyway*, Friends of Broome Bird Observatory newsletter, 1/99 and 2/99, December 1999
- *Bush Heritage News*, Tasmania, Winter 1999
- RSPB Birds UK, Winter 1998, Summer 1999
- *Naragebup News*, Rockingham Regional Environment Centre newsletter, Issue 10 January 2000
- *Malaysian Naturalist*, March, June and December 1998
- Lake Mealup Preservation Society Newsletter, Vol 12, No 4, October 1999
- *The Tattler*, East-Australasian Flyway newsletter for Australasian Wader Study Group, No 21, October 1999 and No 22, January 2000
- Cumberland Bird Observers Club Newsletter, Vol 21, Nos 2 & 3, September-October & November-December 1999
- CALM News, September-October, November-December 1999
- *Malleefowl Matters*, Malleefowl Preservation Group newsletter, No 21, November 1999
- *Galah*, Birds Australia in-house newsletter, Nos 39-41, October-December 1999
- *The Swan Newsletter*, Vol 2, Issue 3, October 1999
- *The Bristler*, Barren Grounds Bird Observatory newsletter, Spring Issue, October 1999
- *The Bird Observer*, Bird Observers Club newsletter, Nos 802-803, November-December 1999
- *Boobook*, Australasian Raptor Association newsletter, Vol 19(2), November 1999
- *Wingspan*, Birds Australian newsletter, Vol 9, No 4, December 1999
- *Emu*, Birds Australia journal, Vol 99, Part 4, December 1999
- *Landscape*, Wildlife Magazine, Vol 15, No 2, Summer 2000
- *Rangeflash*, Issue 9, December 1999
- *Ecoplan News*, Issue 32, Summer 1999-2000
- Swan Avon Catchment Group Information Sheet No 1/2000
- Rotamah Island Bird Observatory Newsletter, Issue 19, December 1999
- *Riverview*, Swan River Trust newsletter, December 1999

Liz Walker
Librarian

BIRDS AUSTRALIA-WA GROUP

Birding Opportunities

WA Bird Notes contains the complete itinerary for all organised **birdwalks** and **campouts**. Typically the birdwalk outings occur each weekend, for either a halfday or a full day's walk, and also during the week halfday walks are held. Campouts are held throughout the year, usually to take advantage of long weekends. If you intend to attend a campout, you are asked to contact the Perry House office to register your intention.

Details are available at the office for those who would like to visit either the

- **Eyre Bird Observatory**, on the Great Australian Bight, or
- **Broome Bird Observatory**

Both observatories offer the opportunity for good birding, and also run courses covering various aspects of birding and other natural history subjects.

Armchair Birding is available through Videos, Tapes and Books available from our library at Perry House. The office is open between 9:30 am and 12:30 pm Monday to Friday.

The **Suburban Bird Survey**, a survey specifically covering birds in the metropolitan area — especially those in your garden — has been running for more than three years, and you are encouraged to submit your records.

Please contact Clive Nealon.

The **Nest Record Scheme** is a continuing collection of breeding records collected from anywhere in the state. Details can be obtained from the office.

The second **Atlas of Australian Birds** is a nationwide survey of our birds that is being conducted over a four-year period. The more observers that take part, the greater our knowledge of our birds and their whereabouts. Please help out by submitting your observations.

For information, please contact Cheryl Gole.

The **Database of WA Birds** is a collection of observations submitted by our members from sites all around WA. The data collected is available on request for a variety of uses. Please fill in a data card for all outings you make and send it to the office where it will augment the data already recorded.

We also assist with official **Research Surveys**, specific to certain species or groups of species. Those currently active are:

- **Hooded Plover survey** contact Phyllis Bentley
- **Wader survey** contact Colin Davis
- **Ground Parrot project** contact Shapelle McNee

Members' Contributions

DWINDLING BIRD NUMBERS IN A METROPOLITAN GARDEN

During the 1978-1982 Bird Atlas Survey in a metropolitan garden in Wembley, over 35 species of birds would be recorded each year but today less than 20 years later that number has been reduced to around 20 species and these species are greatly reduced in numbers except for Rainbow Lorikeets, corellas and ravens. Species such as the Laughing Turtle-dove and the Singing Honeyeater regularly nested often two or three times a year, producing usually two young a session, with both surviving. Juvenile birds of species such as Red Wattlebirds were regularly fed in our trees and shrubs.

During the early 1980s we owned a cat that slept inside on our beds. Yes, he did occasionally kill a bird and brought it into our kitchen — perhaps three times a year. Cats are predators and always will be. They are territorial and guard their territory. We now have had no cat for 15 years and our property has been without a feline guard. Our garden is overrun by five neighbouring cats on the prowl — on the ground we see at least every two weeks a patch of telltale feathers, usually turtle-dove, Singing Honeyeater or Port Lincoln Parrot.

Twelve months ago was our last nesting record of Singing Honeyeaters with two fledglings in a nest in the almond tree 5 m above ground. But alas one morning on investigating alarm calls from the parents there was a male cat, tail curled around a slender branch of the tree, chewing up the second of the fledglings.

Pet cats and dogs provide companionship, especially for the older generation. Cats as pets are important for a child's emotional and social development. But how we look after our cats may influence how much damage they do to populations of birds. We need to prevent our domestic cats getting bored. Perhaps children/adults no longer stimulate our cats with ball games, etc. Perhaps the commercial tinned food is too high in protein and energy giving the cat more energy to expend on its killer instincts? Is the male with high testosterone levels the more efficient killer? Should all male pet cats be mandatorily sterilised not only to cut down reproduction and the threat of more feral cats, but also to cut down on the 'hunting-killer instinct'?

Most importantly, we should keep our cats inside, preferably all the time, but certainly at night.

Our garden is very dense and is never without flowers both native and exotic. Up to the 1980s it could well be referred to as a natural aviary. But alas today the visiting bird species are less than 60% and the numbers of those species only around 25%. Some species may have dwindled because of the disappearance of bush (tree) corridors and others hopefully have managed to find safer nesting areas away from the marauding cat?

M H Bremner

THE MORNING AFTER

The morning following the BAWAG BBQ was cool and clear after the heavy rain on 19 December 1999. I was out and about doing my suburban bird survey. The little lake on the corner of Jon Sanders Drive and Herdsman Parade is where this interesting incident took place.

I could see some Yellow-rumped Thornbills in the distance and could hear some Silvereyes, so I headed in their direction. On closer examination I found Silvereyes flying up to the lower branches of a pine tree and back to the ground again, behaving like Yellow-rumped Thornbills.

I then noticed that the tops of the long grass in the shade of the pine tree had large drops of water on them. The Silvereyes were 'bathing' in them. They were actively opening their wings and fluttering so that even the undersides of their wings were wet. This continued until all the water drops on the shaded long grass were used up and then the birds flew away.

Now I know why some people call bouts of rain 'showers'. There had been plenty on 19 December 1999.

Claire Gerrish

BIRDING ON LORD HOWE ISLAND

Early in November 1999 I spent a week on Lord Howe Island, a beautiful place which is actually the remains of the rim of an ancient extinct volcano. It is reached by a little less than a two-hour flight from Sydney. My visit coincided with the peak period for many of the birds that nest there before flying to more northerly regions for the winter. The lovely White Terns were everywhere, but mostly around the settlement where the tall trees grow. They liked to rest in the Norfolk Island pines, but preferred a different species of tree, also with horizontal branches of no great width, on which to lay their single eggs, often at quite low levels. Since they don't build nests they can be vulnerable at times of gale force winds and unfortunately this did happen one night and some eggs and chicks were casualties. One newly hatched chick which survived was being raised outside a shop, on a branch less than two metres above tables where customers ate their take-aways. These terns were beautiful to watch when flying, usually in pairs, constantly wheeling and changing direction in perfect unison. As they passed overhead their wing and tail feathers looked translucent.

Sooty Terns were also present in large numbers and when not flying could be seen resting and nesting on grassy slopes.

Red-tailed Tropicbirds favoured the hundred metre high Malabar Cliffs at one end of the island as their nesting area, so getting to see them required a rather strenuous uphill walk, but it was well worth it for the spectacular views from the top, as well as the birds.

Common Noddies were gathering dried seaweed and other material at the extreme end of Ned's Beach before flying around the adjacent rocky headland to a shrub-covered hillside where much nest building was taking place.

Two species of Shearwaters, Flesh-footed and Wedge-tailed, had lots of burrows all over the island. When it was almost dark each evening they could be seen flopping rather clumsily on to land before scurrying into their holes.

A walk to Mutton Bird Point ended at a viewing platform that overlooked a flat-topped island where many Masked Boobies were also nesting. I missed seeing Providence Petrels as they had just left, having finished their breeding, and Grey Ternlets, as the bay they favoured was not easy to get to.

Many other species of birds were constantly to be seen around our resort. A pair of Golden Whistlers lived in the surrounding trees and were hardly ever silent, while Emerald Doves and Buff-banded Rails often wandered through the garden. Masked Lapwings and Cattle Egrets in breeding plumage were in nearby paddocks, as also were several species of waders. Whimbrels, Bar and Black-tailed Godwits, Grey and Golden Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones seemed to spend more time there than on the beaches. Another favourite spot for these waders was the grassed areas surrounding the airport runway. Purple Swampheens liked this place as well, as there was a small lake nearby.

A walk to Little Island at the foot of the two mountains at one end of the island brought a meeting with the flightless Lord Howe Island Woodhen. This once almost extinct bird, though still not common, seems to be doing well now, following elimination of its animal predators and a captive breeding program. The one I saw was not at all fazed by my close presence and calmly continued scratching among the leaf litter as I photographed.

The bird list for the island is not huge and I did not see all of them, but at that time of the year they are there in great numbers and made my visit a most enjoyable experience.

Mavis Norgard

SLATY-BACKED THORNBILL SOUTH OF EXPECTED RANGE

Date: 5 November 1999.

Location: latitude 30° 14' 05" longitude 121° 55' 07", about 3 m S of Binti Binti Rocks, Eastern Goldfields.

A pair of birds was seen in moderately thick mixed acacia/patchy mallee covered sand plain. I followed the birds and obtained views over 10 minutes with Leica 10x42 binoculars in sunny morning light.

Features seen and recorded at the time were: thornbill with dark reddish eye, distinctly grey head and back, length-wise dark fine striations on crown, markedly darker, somewhat brownish primaries compared to grey wing coverts. The rump was a pale rufous colour and the birds did not cock their tail.

Their behaviour was unlike that of Chestnut-rumped Thornbills. One only once went to the ground; they spent most of their time in the mid-height of bushes, and did not respond to whistle-'kiss' calls as Chestnut-rumps will generally do. Numerous parties of Chestnut-rumped Thornbills were seen in the area and some were seen within 5 minutes, confirming their markedly different appearance, even of the dark-eyed juveniles of Chestnut-

rumped Thornbills. The Chestnut-rumped Thornbills had an almost warm buffy colour in the morning light.

I used the field guide of Simpson and Day in the field. Using the Pizzey guide in Perth I noticed that this guide shows darker primaries compared to wing coverts — seen as a marked distinguishing feature in field. I knew the bird to be out of known range at the time of sighting. My sighting is one grid block south of old Atlas records and considerably further south of the distribution shown on WA Museum maps. I worked about 5 km further south for a week and did not see any Slaty-backed Thornbills despite careful observation so presumably the sighting is very close to the southern edge of their range.

Martin Gole

POSSIBLE SIGHTING OF A WESTERN GROUND PARROT

At about 3:00 pm on 27 October 1999, we were meandering through some low, flat sandplain country along the southern fringe of the Stirling Range National Park. At one point, we disturbed a parrot which in its haste to get away flew within a few metres of Joan. She saw it well, describing it as green and the size of a Western Rosella, most probably a Ground Parrot.

The area had been burnt only a few years previously and was without much cover. However, across the road is a large area of unburnt plain country, with no trees, just low heath and mallee.

Ray and Joan Garstone

RED-RUMPED SWALLOWS AT BROOME

Early in December 1999, at Broome Bird Observatory we heard a report of 100 Red-rumped Swallows being present at Kununurra. This report encouraged me to look through the numerous Barn Swallows and Tree Martins that flew over the observatory car park every night to roost. The first few attempts revealed nothing — things did not look good until two cyclones (John and Ilsa) moved off the coast towards the Broome region.

As soon as the skies were clear, I again checked the flocks overhead. On 18 December I had a brief view of a swallow that had no dark throat patch, which Barn Swallows distinctly have, plus a very forked long tail with dark under tail coverts. This had to be a 'red-rump'. I pointed this bird out to Barry Evans, a Volunteer at the observatory at the time. Barry has seen this species in Africa and Asia and agreed that it was a Red-rumped Swallow. We both waited, hoping that the bird would return to provide better views. Five minutes later the bird did return, showing us clearly its dark under tail coverts, pale collar and rump. We both noted that we could not see any streaking on the chest of this bird.

The next day we again sifted through the swallows and martins, this time with Chris Hassell.

We managed to see at least two more birds, possibly four, that night.

Since this initial sighting, they have been recorded on all nights but one when looking for them (up to 19 January 2000).

