

# BIRDS OF THE WAITE ARBORETUM AND THE WAITE CONSERVATION RESERVE PART 2

by Max Possingham

Part 1 of this article discussed the bird species commonly recorded in the Waite Arboretum (WA) and the Waite Conservation Reserve (WCR). This part discusses the uncommon species that will be of interest to the more dedicated birdwatcher who is prepared to spend more time on regular visits in all seasons.

## **Water and wetland species**

Eight wetland species have been recorded in the WA. Some are quite unusual in that J Saunders (1983, 1985) reports that over 1972 to 1981, the following were recorded once or twice: Australian Grebe, Great Cormorant, Little Pied Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant, Pacific Heron, Great Egret, Australian White Ibis, Grey Teal and Eurasian Coot. The grebe and the cormorants will only be found in deep water, the grebe foraging for water insects and the cormorants for fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The heron and egret forage in shallow water or sometimes in damp grassland, for frogs, lizards and aquatic invertebrates. The Coot requires deep water for foraging on vegetation and reeds for refuge and nesting, but can be seen on grassland, often utilising food scraps.

Two additional species have been observed in recent years on or near the WA dam; they are small numbers of Cape Barren Goose in early 1995 to early 1996 and one Australian Pelican in August 1994 and 1996. While strictly not a wetland species, the Cape Barren Goose is never far from fresh or brackish water feeding on introduced grasses and legumes, much to the annoyance of graziers. The Pelican feeds on large quantities of fish and would not be satisfied by the dam for very long.

There is one old record of a Buff-banded Rail breeding in the WA.

## **Birds of prey**

By their very nature, birds of prey are unlikely to be numerous in the WA and the WCR, however most of the local raptors will be recorded if one stands looking at the sky for long enough. J Saunders (1983, 1985) reports that the following have been recorded in the WA once or twice: Black-shouldered Kite, Brown Goshawk, Collared Sparrowhawk, Peregrine Falcon, Australian Hobby, Australian Kestrel, Wedge-tailed Eagle, Southern Boobook and Tawny Frogmouth, the latter breeding in the WA in 1989 and 1992. Most of the diurnal birds of prey will be 'overhead transients' rather than 'overhead foragers' and so cannot be recorded as utilising the habitat.

The owl and frogmouth are nocturnal birds of prey, the owl mainly feeding on insects but may take small birds and mammals. The frogmouth feeds on a variety of invertebrates, mainly scorpions, spiders and centipedes with some frogs and small mammals. The owl is quite common in the Adelaide suburbs and is often heard repeatedly calling 'more-pork' or 'boo-book' on spring and summer nights. The frogmouth is less common but does live in the suburbs.

## **Aerial feeders**

In addition to the resident Welcome Swallow, Tree Martin are occasionally recorded feeding on insects well above the tree canopy in the WA and the WCR.

## **Ground Feeders**

The less common ground feeders in the WA are the: Black-tailed Native-hen, Little Corella, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Red-rumped Parrot and Willie Wagtail. The cockatoos need no further comment except that the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, because of its strong bill, is able to feed on wood-boring grubs and the Red-rumped Parrot feeds on grass seeds.

The Willie Wagtail is a widely distributed species in Australia but never at a high density; it is usually seen close to the ground, flitting about or wagging its tail to flush insects.

The Black-tailed Native-hen is a somewhat unusual record for the WA. It is a widely distributed nomadic species with flocks likely to appear or disappear in a matter of days or hours. It usually lives near water, feeding on insects and vegetation and is usually first noticed rapidly running for cover with its characteristic head-down cocked-tail carriage. Other ground feeders likely to be observed occasionally in the WA and the WCR are the finches. The Red-browed Finch is a native species feeding on the seeds of native and introduced grasses and sedges, berries, insects and the seeds of casuarinas. The European Goldfinch and European Greenfinch were introduced. The Goldfinch is confined to the seeds of exotic plants, particularly composite weed species and a few insects. On the other hand the Greenfinch is more adaptable, feeding on seeds from native grasses and crops; it has been observed utilising sea rocket. It can be detected in spring by its very characteristic call, a descending grasshopper-like 'birrrzzz'.

For want of a better category, I have placed the two local kingfishers in this community since they take most food from the ground. Both the Laughing Kookaburra and Sacred Kingfisher are occasionally recorded in the WA and WCR. They normally scan the ground from an exposed perch for insects (grasshoppers), reptiles, frogs, snakes and other small vertebrates, the larger bird taking the larger prey. Of interest is the fact that the Sacred Kingfisher will also perch on rocky foreshores or reefs taking marine animals.

The Apostle Bird, one of the communal breeders in Australia, visited the WA from September to December 1972 to 1975, breeding in 1972. They usually live in eucalypt woodland and mallee in inland NSW and Victoria, extending from there into South Australia with an outpost in Northern Territory. They are never far from water, needing it to build their mud nests. They are opportunistic feeders eating mainly insects and seeds and become very confiding near picnic and camping grounds, utilising human food scraps. They have been recorded catching and killing mice. They may or may not appear again in the Adelaide suburbs.

## **Nectar feeders**

One would expect that the Banksia around the dam would attract the New Holland Honeyeater and the Little Wattlebird, both recognised banksia lovers. It is suspected that the Noisy Miner, well known for its aggressive behaviour, will reduce these and other honeyeaters to low numbers. The Red Wattlebird, probably too large for the Noisy Miner to bully, is unusually low in numbers in the WA for a suburban location with an abundance of flowering eucalypts.

The Purple-crowned Lorikeet, smaller than the Rainbow and Musk Lorikeets, visits both sites occasionally to feed on nectar and pollen. Experienced bird-watchers use the calls of these three lorikeets for identification.

The WCR seems to provide more attractive habitats for the honeyeaters with the: Yellow-faced Honeyeater, White-plumed Honeyeater, Brown-headed Honeyeater, White-naped Honeyeater, Crescent Honeyeater and Eastern Spinebill present at medium to low density. In spite of these species being taxonomically grouped as honeyeaters, they exploit other food sources, eg insects (by leaf gleaning or hawking), manna, fruit, honeydew and sometimes taking insects, etc from the ground. The sources of nectar vary from the eucalypts, heath, eg *Astroloma* sp, and garden plants.

Some of these honeyeaters may drift down into the WA, to reward the diligent bird-watcher.

### **Leaf and/or bark gleaners**

The less common species in this community are the Rufous Whistler, Golden Whistler, Grey Shrike-thrush, Varied Sittella, Spotted Pardalote and Silvereye.

Two of these species were recorded in the WA by J Saunders (1983, 1985), viz the Rufous Whistler, once in 1972 and 3 or 4 Silvereye in June to December. The others, as well as these two, have been recorded in the WCR.

The cuckoos are members of this community and the Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo and the Fan-tailed Cuckoo, both being nomadic, will occasionally be recorded during in spring and summer in the WCR. Both species have diagnostic calls, parasitise fairy-wrens, thornbills and flycatchers and feed on insects and caterpillars, including the hairy variety.

### **Generalists**

The Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, also readily identified by its characteristic call, like the cuckoos, is a caterpillar-eater, but also feeds on insects, beetles, seeds and vegetable matter. This species is occasionally seen around Adelaide and J Saunders (1982) reports this species present in the WA in July 1976 and 1981; it is more common in the WCR.

### **Specialists**

The Mistletoebird, because of its wide ranging nomadic habit, searching for flowering mistletoe, is occasionally recorded in the Adelaide suburbs, the WA and the WCR. While the main food is mistletoe berries, other foods are used, such as insects and the fruit of other plants including privet, hawthorn, cotoneaster and saltbush.

It assists the distribution of mistletoe by turning sideways to deposit the sticky seed on its perch. I have seen a dead acacia bush literally festooned with dead mistletoe seeds from an adjacent live acacia liberally infested with mistletoe.

### **Historic records**

An unpublished list of bird species observed in the WA by Professor I R Falconer, dated 1963, illustrates their decline in the Adelaide foothills. He lists White-browed Babbler, Brown Treecreeper, Grey Butcherbird, Striated Thornbill and Crested Shrike-tit, which are now unlikely to be observed in WA or the WCR.

### **Epilogue**

The material in both parts of the article should help novice birdwatchers to identify and appreciate the bird species in the Waite Arboretum and the Waite Conservation Reserve. I suggest that their interest be put to use by recording the birds observed by using the record scheme and sheets available from the curator.

Saunders, J (1983). Birds of the Waite Arboretum: 1972-1981. *South Australian Ornithologist*, 29, 40-41.

Saunders, J (1995). Birds of the Waite Arboretum. *Bird Talk*, Published by the Adelaide Ornithologists Club Inc, Vol 3 Part 7. 137-138.

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