

# Branch Reports

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

During the last decade ornithological investigations on the islands on the Western Australian coast have been carried out by a number of workers and the results are now being published. Dr G. M. Storr studied the fauna of Rottne Island (*Emu*, **64**: 48-60, 105-13, 172-80), the Houtman Abrolhos (*J. Roy. Soc. W. Aust.*; **43**: 59-62; **48**: 1-14, *Emu*, **65**: 209-21), Bald Island (*W. Aust. Nat.*, **9**: 187-96) and Depuch Island (*Spec. Publ. W. Aust. Mus.*, no. 2: 80-1) and J. Ford investigated the 36 islands between Dongara and Lancelin (*Emu*, **64**: 129-44; 181-203). Research is now switching to islands off the south and north-west coasts.

A new addition to the south-western Australian bird list is the Red-browed Finch, *Aegintha temporalis*, which has become established in the Darling Range gullies east of Perth, the habitat including orchard land and heavily vegetated creeks and paper-bark swamps. (*J. Dell. W. Aust. Nat.*, **9**: 160-9). Its presence in Western Australia is due to the escape or release of aviary birds around 1958. The species has been seen as far south as Bickley (M. Parton, *ibid.* **9**: 19). Another important contribution on finches is that by A. Y. Pepper (*ibid.* **9**: 49-57) who has studied the breeding and general behaviour of caged Red-eared Firetails, *Zonaeginthus oculus*.

Dr D. L. Serventy (*Emu*, **64**: 154) has already drawn attention to the first known nesting of the Pelican, *Pelicanus conspicillatus*, south of Pelican Island, Shark Bay—at Creery Island in the Mandurah estuary in August 1963 and on Nirimba Cay in Peel Inlet in January 1964 (D. L. Serventy and H. B. Shugg. *W. Aust. Nat.*, **9**: 80-4).

Despite his departure from Western Australia, Dr G. F. Mees, formerly Curator of Birds of the Western Australian Museum, and now of the Leiden Museum, has maintained his interest in Australian ornithology. A recent paper on variation in Western Australian birds (*J. Roy. Soc. W. Aust.*, **47**: 91-6) has already been reviewed by G. M. Storr (*Emu*, **64**: 329) and other contributions are in the process of preparation.

The death of Mr C. L. E. Orton, honorary life member, is recorded with regret. Those who had the good fortune to have known Mr Orton will remember his friendly disposition, good humour and numerous anecdotes. A full account of his activities is given by D. L. Serventy (*W. Aust. Nat.*, **9**: 197-9; *Emu*, **65**: 132).

## EXPEDITIONS

The third of the Harold Hall Expeditions, on behalf of the British Museum (Natural History), operated in Western Australia from June 29 to September 18, 1965. The leader was Mrs B. P. Hall, experienced in African collecting expeditions, and the other English members were Miss Ena Thomas and Messrs Derek Goodwin and Graham Cowles (who will be remembered as the discoverer and describer of Hall's Babbler, *Pomatostomus halli*, collected in the first expedition). The area worked included Eucla and Cocklebiddy before the expedition had a resting period in Perth, where the party was joined by Dr D. L. Serventy and Mr A. G. Mathews. They then proceeded inland and had collecting camps at Mt Shenton (north-east of Laverton), Warburton Mission, the Rawlinson Range and various places in the Gibson Desert (including the Van der Linden Lakes, Lake Gruska and Mungilli Claypan), with a final camp at Carnegie Station. The desert area was in a dry stage with a great lack of surface water. Though, as a consequence, birds were sparsely distributed, a considerable number of species were observed. At the Rawlinson Range, for instance, a total of 54 species were encountered and a representative series of study skins made. Though no spectacular discoveries were reported much useful information was accumulated on distribution, breeding seasons, moult, feeding habits, etc.

In October, 1964, Mr W. H. Cottrell of the Harvard Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Mr A. G. Mathews carried out a collecting trip on the eastern margins of the wheatbelt district. About 200 specimens of 140 species were collected and are now in the Harvard Museum. A highlight of the trip was the collection of a specimen of the rarely observed Grey Honey-

eater, *Conopophila whitei* on Thundelarra Station, between Yalgoo and Paynes Find (*W. Aust. Nat.*, 10: 45).

An investigation currently being carried out on quail-thrushes, *Cinclosoma*, by Mr J. Ford has revealed startling range extensions and new data on interspecific relationships. In pursuance of this study, field expeditions have been undertaken to the Shark Bay district, Yalgoo, the Ashburton River valley, Nullarbor Plain, Great Victoria Desert and the eastern goldfields. Mr Ford would welcome information on habitat preferences where the various species overlap geographically.

### FAUNA ADMINISTRATION

The department of Fisheries and Fauna has supplied the following details of numbers of species of native birds trapped in and exported from Western Australia during 1964. Departmental names are used and numbers trapped are bracketed. Gouldian Finch 1,121 (928); Masked Finch 1,146 (993); Longtail Finch 2,340 (1,978); Double-bar Finch 141 (220); Yellow-rump Finch 12; Blood Finch 4 (36); Zebra Finch 93 (4); Pictorella Finch 246 (377); Painted Finch 68 (105); Star Finch 1,008 (867); Chestnut Finch (6); Budgerygah 33; Smoker Parrot 294 (4); Western Rosella 576; Twenty-eight Parrot 497 (211); Western King Parrot 268 (735); Galah 24 (14); Major Mitchell 5; Little Corella 4; Sulphur-crested Cockatoo 1; Red-tailed Black Cockatoo 12; White-tailed Black Cockatoo 19; Little Blue Bonnet 6; Port Lincoln Parrot 12; Northern Rosella 4; Crimson-winged Parrot 8; Wedge-tailed Eagle 2; Brown Hawk 1; Little Falcon 1; Freckled Duck 5; Spinifex Pigeon 2; The number of licensed trappers who operated in 1964 was twenty-six.

Several small fauna and flora reserves ranging from 22 to 1425 acres have been created since the last report.

JULIAN FORD,  
Branch Secretary.

### A.C.T. BRANCH

Following an inaugural meeting held on June 3, 1964, when 27 members and others interested decided that regular monthly meetings should be conducted, a request was forwarded to Council that a branch of the R.A.O.U. be formed in the A.C.T. Our request was granted and the year which followed has been an active and successful one.

Regular monthly meetings have been held in the C.S.I.R.O. Lecture Theatre with an average attendance of 35. Members have been asked to record their observations in a book provided at meetings with the ultimate aim of using the information in a projected Handlist to the Birds of the A.C.T. Five new records for the A.C.T. were made during the year and already the draft for the list has been prepared.

The only current field project at present in operation is a survey of the wintering Pied Currawongs around Canberra.

Since April 1965, a Monthly Newsletter has been circulated amongst members and local T.V. radio and newspapers, resulting in some publicity for the branch and several new members have joined the R.A.O.U. during the year.

A list of R.A.O.U. members in the A.C.T. and surrounding districts has been published and circulated amongst members, the total now standing at 53.

A committee has been elected to conduct the affairs of the branch and this now meets regularly each month. Plans are in hand to widen the scope of activities other than regular monthly meetings and we are looking forward to another progressive year.

G. CHAPMAN,  
Branch Secretary.