

WESTERN AUSTRALIA BIRDING TRIP REPORT, 20/12/12 – 6/1/13



We had an excellent trip to Western Australia over Xmas 2012. This was partly a family holiday but I still fitted lots of birding in. We were based in the south-west around Esperance before heading west to the Stirling Ranges and Cheynes Beach, and then ending up north of Perth around Lancelin. Compared to many other destinations, seeing most of the endemics in WA is comparatively straightforward and the transport/accommodation is all very easy for the visiting birder. We camped pretty much everywhere which worked well, though we needed to book the sites at Esperance and Cheynes Beach in advance because of the Xmas/New Year holidays.

Not too much advance prep is required on the birding front. As usual we didn't use any tapes or guides but a thorough read through John O'Connor's website is essential (<http://birdingwa.iinet.net.au/>). Visiting Cheynes Beach is a must. A 4x4 would have been useful at a number of sites and you would definitely need one to have a good crack at Western Ground Parrot down Poison Creek track in Cape Arid NP. Read up beforehand on Carnaby's/Baudin's Black Cockatoo ID: this website has an excellent summary of the key pointers (<http://wabirdingblog.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/id-feature-white-tailed-black-cockatoos.html>)

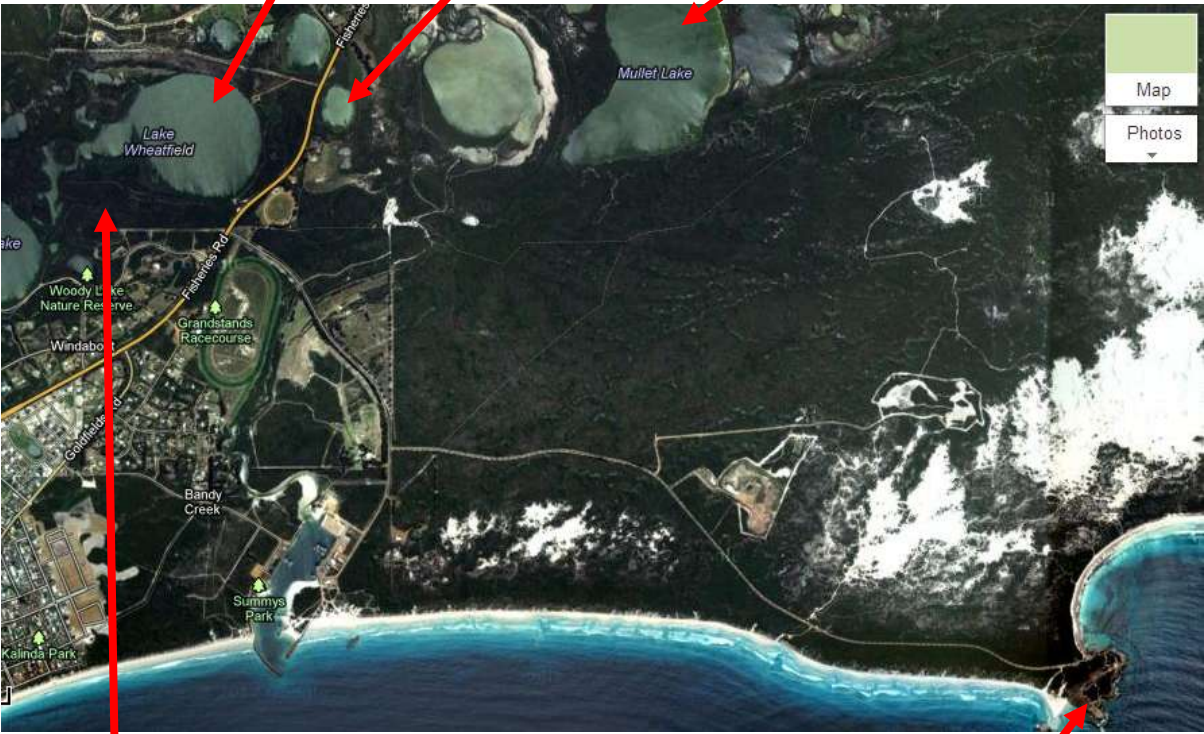
We started and finished around Perth. The main sites are already very well covered elsewhere so only worth mentioning briefly here. Herdsmen's Lake was too high for waders/crakes when we visited but we saw all the usual wildfowl, and a number of species we might have struggled to see elsewhere including White-necked Heron, Swamp Harrier and Clamorous Reed Warbler. Lake Monger is altogether busier than Herdsmen's but was the place to see the excellent Pink-eared Duck. John Forrest National Park just north of Perth is a quiet (and somewhat odd) place but was very good for Red-tailed Black Cockatoo. The rest of the report below goes through the key sites in more detail.

AREA EAST OF ESPERANCE (22/12/13 – 30/12/13)

Lake Wheatfield has a bird hide in the SE corner. The lake itself was excellent for herons, egrets and ibises and held good numbers of Yellow-billed Spoonbill. Wildfowl included good numbers of Musk Duck.

Roadside lake worth checking: wildfowl, Black-winged Stilt, Masked Lapwing, White-faced Heron.

Mullet Lake: breeding Red-capped Plover and we had impressive numbers of wildfowl, Black Swan and Pelicans on the lakes. Also a small group of Red-necked Stint. Access via Merrivale Rd.



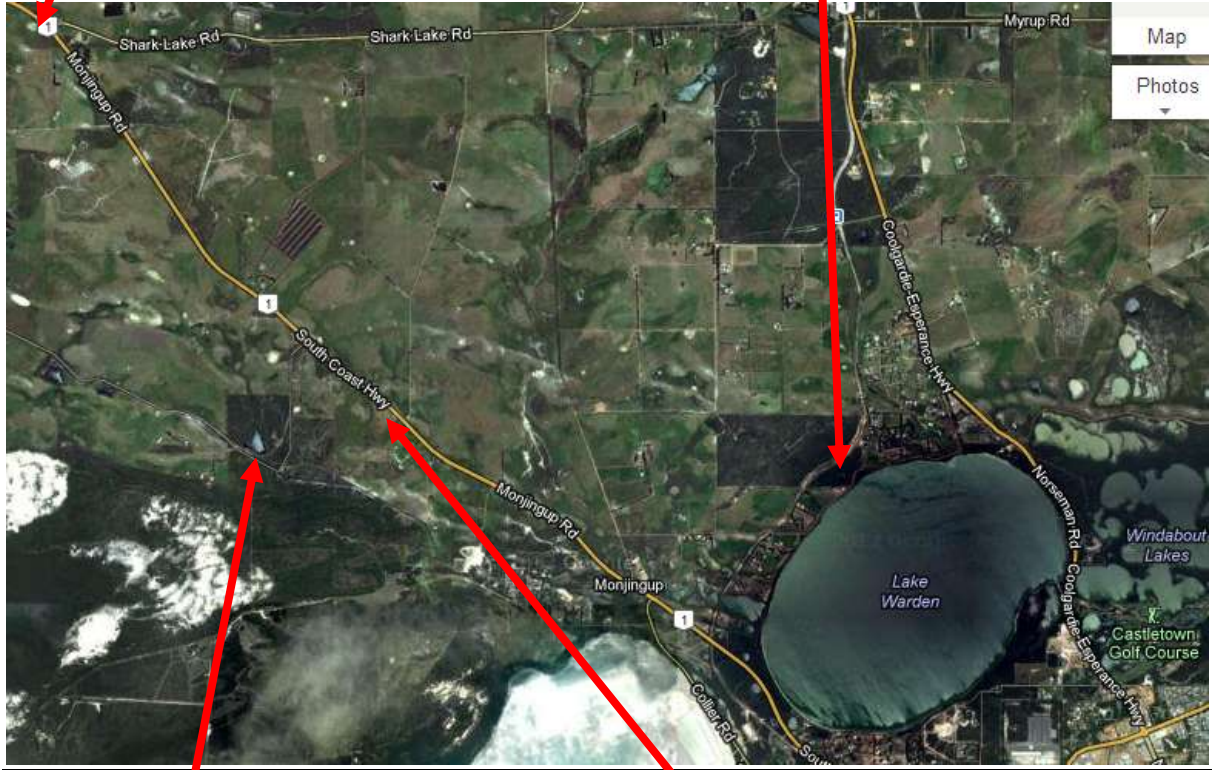
There is another bird hide on the walk between Wheatfield and Woody Lake. The walk itself was good for birds, including Restless Flycatcher, Red-eared Firetail and Red-capped Parrot.

Great views of Rock Parrot on the rocky headland here (Wylie Beach on the Bandy Creek road)

NORTH-WEST OF ESPERANCE (22/12/13 – 30/12/13)

Roadside flash worth checking to the west of the road here. Chestnut and Grey Teal, Aus Grebe, White-faced Heron, Black-winged Stilt, Red-necked Stint

Lake Warden: NW shore accessed from Stearne Rd. Hooded Plover was the highlight (around 20). Red-capped Plover also seen. White-winged Triller in the roadside fields here.



Lake Monjingup: from Telegraph Rd off the Hwy. Lake itself held Chestnut Teal, Darter and Black-fronted Dotterel on the shore. The 'wilderness' walk beyond the lake and the boardwalk circuit are both worth covering. This area was excellent for Elegant Parrot. Western Spinebill and Western Wattlebird both common, Red-eared Firetail seen briefly, Golden Whistler and Stubble Quail also recorded amongst others. Black-shouldered Kite, Wedge-tailed Eagle and Collared Sparrowhawk represented the raptors.

Roadside field here very reliable for Cape Barren Goose. Near a windmill c1km before the Lake Monjingup tum-off

CAPE LE GRAND NATIONAL PARK (25/12/13)



Thistle Cove: walk through the dunes at the back to get to a small lagoon and excellent general birding spot. On Xmas day here, I had Rock Parrot, a family party of Red-eared Firetail, Southern Emu-Wren, Sacred Kingfisher, Tawny-crowned Honeyeater and Musk Duck in around half an hour.

Other notable sites near Esperance:

Cape Arid National Park – a tricky area to cover and we were hampered by not having a 4WD vehicle which could open up the possibility of Western Ground Parrot. Highlights were Hooded Plover breeding on the beach from the Thomas River mouth; Black-faced Cormorant offshore and on the Thomas River itself; and a Southern Emu Wren near the fee station for the Thomas River part of the park. Brown Falcon, Brush Bronzewing, Red-capped Parrot also recorded. We also had a memorable encounter with a Western Tiger Snake!

Twilight Beach west of Esperance: The rocky point here also held Rock Parrot. It's best climbed up via the smaller beach just west of the carpark.

Ten mile Lagoon, Esperance: A nice place and had Pacific Gull, Crested Tern, Caspian Tern and Sooty Oystercatcher.

FITZGERALD RIVER BRIDGE (30/12/12)

This area is recommend by Frank O'Connor on his website. It's 35km east of Jerramungup where the South Coast Highway crosses the Fitzgerald River. We birded it briefly in scorching hot conditions in the middle of the day. Map below shows the area where the road crosses the river and the spot where we bagged great views of a Western Whipbird:



Point blank views of a very showy **Western Whipbird** here. White-eared Honeyeater was common in the bushes on the S side of the road.

Pic of me below in celebratory mood on the 'Western Whipbird track', Fitzgerald River:



STIRLING RANGE RETREAT (30/12/12 – 1/1/13)


The Retreat is a great place to camp (or to stay in one of the chalets with AC if your budget stretches that far). The image below shows just how much you can see within a short radius of your tent!



Elsewhere in the Stirling Ranges, the Ongerup creek walk added Emu with three small young, Inland, Yellow-rumped and Western Thornbill (my only sighting of the trip), Western Gerygone, Scarlet Robin and a single White-breasted Robin. Nearby Moinjup campsite didn't add much but was definitely birdy, with good views of Red-capped Parrot and plenty of Striated Pardalote. We climbed Bluff Knoll one day, setting off as early as possible to avoid climbing in the heat. Generally quiet but Western Spinebill was quiet common on the approach to the summit.

CHEYNES BEACH (1/1/13 – 3/3/13)

An excellent site and a must for any birder visiting WA. The campsite was expensive and very busy but supremely well positioned for birding! We had our only significant dip of the trip here, Western Bristlebird, though this was partly because I had inexplicably failed to learn the call before the trip. Unbeatable views of Noisy Scrub-bird and the general quality of birding more than made up for it though.

<p>Campsite was good. Red-winged Fairy Wren from the tent, Brush Bronzewing, White-breasted Robin common, Red-capped Parrot, Carnaby's Black Cockatoo roost here, Purple-crowned Lorikeet often overhead.</p>	<p>The place for Noisy Scrub-bird. Usually just after the first dirt track on your left after the campsite turn-off. Crippling views. Not sure about the 'watching for it to cross the road' technique: we never saw it cross once!</p>	<p>Whole area good for raptors. W-b Sea Eagle here, with Wedge-tailed and Little also seen, and enjoyed watching the B-s Kites.</p>
		
<p>Good area for Southern Emu Wren. NH Honeyeaters abundant along with good nos of Tawny-crowned, White-cheeked, Western Spinebill.</p>	<p>Noisy Scrub Bird singing here. Spotted Harrier also seen in this area and good views of Purple-crowned Lorikeet.</p>	<p>Western Whipbird here on track east after Back Beach turn-off, though elusive and only seen briefly.</p>

We had a few sightings of interest on our travels from Cheynes Beach: Australasian Gannet and Great-winged Petrel from the Gap (which was otherwise quiet for seabirds), and Western Rosella commonly seen early morning on the roads around Albany. We stopped at the Lower Kalgan River Bridge but the levels were generally too high for waders with the exception of Greenshank and Common Sandpiper. On the way back to Perth we stopped very briefly near Rocky Gully: couldn't immediately find any Western Corellas (though didn't try too hard) but did get some fantastic Baudin's Black Cockatoo.

LAKE MCLARTY (NEAR MANDURAH)

This should be on every visiting birder's itinerary if you are visiting around this time of year. A real spectacle with the shoreline of the lake thronging with waders. Follow the directions given by O'Connor: developments mean the final bit of Mill Road has changed a bit but continue on it until you reach a parking area on the west side of the lake. We only walked half of the western shore but really this site requires a full day walking all the way round the lake. Highlights were:

Whistling Kite: frequently overhead
Black-winged Stilt: commonest wader
Banded Stilt: 1 in full breeding plumage, v nice
Red-necked Avocet: plenty: a real cracker
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper: lots!
Red-necked Stint: a flock of c60
Greenshank 1
Whiskered Tern: c20
White-winged Black Tern: 2+ juvs
Brown Songlark: 1 on fenceposts on Mill Road
Black-faced Woodswallow: Mill Rd

LANCELIN/PINNACLES DESERT (5/1/13 – 6/1/13)

A brief visit at the end of the trip. The Pinnacles produced Black-faced Woodswallow and White-backed Swallow. At Lancelin, Edward Island held Bridled and Crested Terns. The lookout from Hinchcliffe Street to Lancelin Island was good: White-winged Fairy Wren from the path to the lookout, and the island itself held loads of Bridled and Crested Terns, 2 Osprey and good numbers of Common Noddy towards the North end of the island (NB you definitely need a scope for the lookout here).

Feel free to contact me for any additional info/queries (Brendan.Threlfall at gmail.com)

PHOTOS: A random selection below just to whet the appetite for those thinking of visiting!



L: Hooded Plover, Cape Arid NP R: Carnaby's Black Cockatoo, Stirling Range Retreat



L: Pink-eared Duck, Lake Monger; R: Sooty Oystercatcher, Caspian Tern: 10 mile Lagoon, Esperance



L: Elegant Parrot, Stirling Range Retreat; R: Splendid Fairy Wren, Cheynes Beach