

North-west Australia Wader Study Expedition 1996

North-west Australia is one of the most important regions in the world for waders with up to three quarters of a million individuals of 50 species spread between three main locations:

Roebuck Bay/Roebuck plains, near Broome;
80 Mile Beach/Anna Plains, 250 km SW of Broome; and
Port Hedland Saltworks, 600 km SW of Broome

Easy accessibility has made the area a prime location for the study of many species of wader not previously studied elsewhere, as well as for the northern populations of species which occur in southern Australia and in other parts of the world. Research has been carried out by a series of expeditions since 1981 and supplemented in recent years by year-round data collection by the wardens of (and visitors to) Broome Bird Observatory (established by the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union in 1988).

The 1996 expedition will be the 16th to NW Australia and will last for seven weeks from 2 March to 20 April. Participants are encouraged to come for as long as possible (preferably a minimum of 2-3 weeks). They are also welcome to stay at Broome Bird Observatory outside the 'core' expedition dates - counting of migration departures will, for example, be continuing until the end of April.

The detailed itinerary has been drawn up on the basis of the heights and times of high tide. Wherever possible the expedition will be at Broome during weekends in order to most easily facilitate the joining or departure of participants. However, it is possible to arrive or depart from other locations if this is more convenient. 80 Mile Beach/Anna Plains is only a three hour bus ride from Broome (a daily service) and there are good flights to and from Port Hedland (to Perth, Broome and Darwin).

It is intended that around 20 participants will be in the field together throughout the seven week period. As in previous years it is expected that between one third and a half of these will be from overseas, with a good variety of countries represented (usually around eight). Participation in the expedition is also being offered to a limited number of delegates attending the international Ramsar Conference being held in Brisbane from 19 to 27 March.

OBJECTIVES

The fieldwork programme is designed to build on foundations laid by earlier expeditions and, in particular to fill gaps in the existing data. The main activities will include:

- **Banding** - mainly by cannon-netting, but with some mist netting - and associated leg-flagging and moult, weight and other biometric data collection. During the 1994 NWA expedition some 6,000 waders of 36 species were caught (as well as eight species of terns and several hundred passerines).
- **Visible migration departure counts** - four years of data at Roebuck Bay, Broome, has now been collected, with some 20-40,000 individuals being seen leaving each year. This occurs mainly from about 25 March to 15 April, though some departures occur early in March and continue until the end of April. Particular effort will also be made in 1996 to obtain comparisons between departures from 80 Mile Beach and Broome, with observations taking place at both locations simultaneously.
- **Counting** - population counts at all the main locations will be made, as usual, throughout the March/April period - to correlate with visible migration and banding data.

The success of the expedition will be maximised if we have a strong team in the field throughout the seven week period. It will be particularly valuable to have people already experienced in wader banding and counting, but those with less experience are also welcome. We have regularly had WSG participants from around the world on our previous expeditions and WSG members are especially welcome to join us.

It is important however, that prospective participants indicate the preferred dates as soon as possible so that manpower can be scheduled to give as even a cover as possible. It is necessary to do this for logistic reasons - particular with transport limitations in mind.

For those interested in participating, a detailed factsheet has been prepared with further information on costs, transportation possibilities etc., together with the proposed itinerary. This is obtainable from:

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