

## FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT of the RAOU NEST RECORD SCHEME

Participants so promptly returned cards completed during the 1967-68 season that I could write this report only one month after the end of the recording year (30 June 1968). I am grateful for this promptness. Admittedly returns are probably not yet complete for 1967-68 because experience shows that records for previous years keep coming in, but I estimate that already well over 90% of the records for last season have come to hand. Moreover returns for 1967-68 are about 25% up on those for 1966-7 and this is decidedly encouraging.

### *Participation*

Since 1 July 1967 the following six people have joined the scheme:

C. Bevege (Mrs), NSW  
R. Bigg (Mrs), NSW  
L. W. C. Filewood, Papua  
H. Laybourne-Smith (Mrs), SA  
E. G. Reynolds, NSW  
E. R. Seymour, WA

This is fewer recruits than in previous years. It brings the total to 80 individual participants and three corporate bodies, which gives an idea of the incidence of recording throughout the country. Participants are concentrated in the south-east, and in spite of the welcome addition of Messrs Sedgwick and Seymour recently Western Australia is deplorably badly represented. Also now that Mrs Gill has had to give up recording and R. K. Carruthers has left Mt Isa northern and central Queensland are almost equally badly represented. Thus contributions are mostly coming from eastern NSW, ACT, Victoria, Tasmania and south-eastern South Australia. Though this is a large area which will provide interesting data, the scheme is handicapped by the lack of regular recording in northern, inland and western areas. If there was a steady contribution from a few places in these areas progress would be quicker because the contrasts would be greater in breeding behaviour of common species. Problems would be more quickly defined and possible explanations or lines of investigation appear more obviously.

A total of 2,283 completed cards was returned for the 1967-68 season, by forty individuals and VORG, but the number of people recording was greater because individuals enlisted help and several persons contributed to the efforts of VORG. My own contribution for instance contains 229 records supplied by Messrs B. Baker, M. Clayton and M. Nicholas who are to be congratulated for a valuable and sustained effort. Table I lists the official participants, who completed cards, and their contributions. Several people returned cards for earlier seasons and there is still a tendency by contributors to record two clutches or broods in the same nest on the same card. Adjustments have to be made and in consequence some contributors may note that the totals attributed to them in Table I do not agree with the number of cards they submitted.

The Table shows who were the chief contributors and, if numbers only are considered, may embarrass those who returned few cards. But this is too superficial an approach because the value of recording lies both in numbers and in accurate details, so that one card with full details of a nest may be worth ten records of single visits, but yet all the records are useful and valuable. Major contributors such as B. L. Doecke, R. C. Good, L. C. Heinecke, J. N. Hobbs, F. E. Jones, J. B. Paton, A. Stokes, E. B. Thomas, VORG (organized by D. L. Bowrey) and J. R. Wheeler are especially to be congratulated on their effort, but many others who sent in far fewer cards recorded so many important and interesting details that it is not possible to say who contributes best to the scheme. Special mention should be made of P. E. Roberts, perhaps the first in Australia to attempt systematic nest recording, who generously sent in all his records for early years. These were greatly appreciated.

TABLE I

*Contributors to the scheme for 1967-68*

(Number of cards contributed in brackets after name)

R. Anderson (2)	F. E. Jones (79)
P. and R. Balmford (41)	S. G. Lane (41)
Maj. H. L. Bell (9)	Mrs H. N. Laybourne-Smith (21)
I. Betts (6)	S. Marchant (591)
Mrs C. Bevege (7)	R. J. Martin (27)
Mrs R. Bigg (50)	J. L. McKean (9)
J. Bywater (9)	B. Morgan (16)
R. K. Carruthers (35)	A. Morris (11)
R. P. Cooper (73)	L. Neilsen (53)
Mrs C. C. Crowe (53)	Mrs J. B. Paton (76)
D. H. Davidson (3)	I. C. R. Rowley (26)
B. L. Doecke (96)	E. H. Sedgwick (1)
L. W. C. Filewood (3)	E. R. Seymour (6)
Mrs P. J. Foster (31)	A. Stokes (95)
R. C. Good (94)	D. G. Thomas (51)
Mrs A. Grant (15)	E. B. Thomas (66)
T. H. Guthrie (6)	VORG (148)
F. M. Hamilton (15)	L. E. Wall (10)
L. C. Heinecke (138)	N. Weatherill (54)
J. N. Hobbs (91)	J. R. Wheeler (116)
W. Horton (9)	

*Results*

The total number of completed cards is now 7,756, divided as follows:

pre-1964	590
1964-1965	1,574
1965-1966	1,592
1966-1967	1,771
1967-1968	2,229

Four hundred and one species of the 1926 Check-list, 13 introduced species, 2 new species since the Check-list and 7 New Guinea species are represented. The average is 18.3 cards per species, but the majority is still below double figures and only 96 species exceed the average. In accordance with previous practice only those species with substantial totals are listed in Table II and this year the lower limit is raised to 40 cards. Scientific names are omitted for reasons of space and the common names are those of the 1926 Check-list.

Naturally as the scheme continues, the average number of cards per species rises, more species enter the top league and fewer new species remain to be recorded. This year 49 species qualify for inclusion in Table II compared with 42 last year. The Hoary-headed Grebe, Black-fronted Dotterel and Little Grassbird disappear, and the Brown Weebill, Starling, Little Raven, House Sparrow, White-winged Chough, Little Wattlebird, Red Wattlebird, Leaden Flycatcher, Zebra Finch and Noisy Friarbird join the leaders. The Starling and House Sparrow improved spectacularly because of contributions by N. Weatherill and P. and R. Balmford respectively. Though these records may leave something to be desired in detail, they provide interesting and valuable information. People often think that such 'trash' species are not worth studying, but a full knowledge of their breeding in Australia could contribute importantly to the understanding of many ornithological problems because it would afford in different conditions a direct comparison with breeding in the original range of the species.

Fifteen species now have 100 or more cards and these are much the same as last year with only minor shifts in position on the Table except that both Yellow-tailed Thornbill and Crested Pigeon have improved considerably and the Banded Plover has fallen off. Other species which improved notably are the Black and White-backed Magpies and the Noisy Miner, while the Black Duck, Silver Gull, Golden Whistler and Whistling Eagle dropped down comparably. No doubt these fluctuations were caused

by the chances of observation, but the decline in records of the Black Duck may represent a bad breeding season; at Canberra far fewer broods appeared on the lake than in previous years.

All the species in Table II are common and their nests or broods are easily observed, but the records for the leading 20 species or so are likely to continue to accumulate more rapidly than the rest. These then will become what we may call the bread-and-butter species and to them we may look for the earliest results. The Spur-winged Plover still heads the list with a long and increasing lead because of the special attention paid to it in Tasmania by D. G. Thomas, L. E. Wall and R. C. Good; it is still the only species with more than 100 records during the season, though compared with previous years these declined considerably. However very good totals were received for Willie Wagtail, Superb Blue Wren, Magpie Lark, Grey Fantail, Yellow-tailed Thornbill and Crested Pigeon. This year's total more than doubled the records previously received for the last two species.

In spite of the greater total intake of cards fewer cards were returned for non-passerine species than in any previous season. In other words the increase in recording has been for passerine and introduced species. This is understandable and welcome because the common passerines are easier to observe than the others and it is from them that results will be best and most quickly obtained. Yet it is a pity that sea birds, waterfowl and other such species receive so little attention. J. R. Wheeler is almost the only recorder to send in cards for colonial sea birds though VORG contributed some welcome records. Either the use and value of colonial-type cards have not been appreciated or few participants have the opportunity for work around the coast.

Most recorders filled in schedules and summary forms circulated in March, which helped me very much; and it has been interesting to estimate roughly the effort put into nest recording. Perhaps about 4,000 hours of searching were made by 20 recorders, resulting in the recording of 1,600 nests. It is encouraging to suppose from this that about half of those who send in cards treat the matter seriously; but let me repeat that the more casual effort of the other half of the recorders produces valuable results which are appreciated.

During the year a lot of information for migratory species has been extracted from the cards for Lloyd Nielsen. Miss J. Waite has inspected all the cards for species of *Rhipidura* which she is studying at Monash University. I have used much information from the cards for a dissertation on clutch-size in Australia which was given in October 1968 at Congress.

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12 August 1968.

TABLE II  
*Species List of Nest Record Cards*  
 (only species with 40+ cards)

	to 1966	1966-67	1967-68	Total
Crested Pigeon	34	21	61	116
Silver Gull	31	19	6	56
Spur-winged Plover	439	181	103	723
Banded Plover	73	31	9	113
Red-capped Dotterel	63	37	59	159
Black Duck	37	18	8	63
Whistling Eagle	18	17	7	42
Laughing Kookaburra	23	20	14	57
Welcome Swallow	144	33	58	235
Fairy Martin	27	19	17	63
Grey Fantail	76	40	60	176
Willie Wagtail	115	52	89	256
Leaden Flycatcher	19	10	15	44
Southern Yellow Robin	61	25	27	113
Golden Whistler	27	10	10	47
Rufous Whistler	51	18	31	100
Grey Shrike-Thrush	20	15	13	48
Magpie Lark	48	46	73	167
Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike	36	16	12	62
White-winged Triller	29	23	19	71
White-fronted Chat	47	10	16	73
White-throated Warbler	26	21	33	80
Brown Weebill	8	14	31	53
Brown Thornbill	30	5	11	46
Buff-tailed Thornbill	24	11	26	61
Yellow-tailed Thornbill	46	22	69	137
Reed Warbler	38	20	16	74
Superb Blue Wren	68	42	73	183
White-browed Woodswallow	53	3	31	87
Dusky Woodswallow	56	25	32	113
Silvereye	53	20	39	112
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	41	22	33	96
White-plumed Honeyeater	22	14	20	56
Yellow-winged Honeyeater	43	11	22	76
Noisy Miner	22	11	28	61
Little Wattlebird	11	19	15	45
Red Wattlebird	10	12	22	44
Noisy Friarbird	16	9	17	42
Zebra Finch	20	9	14	43
Banded Finch	38	6	13	57
Red-browed Finch	28	18	25	71
Little Raven	—	10	43	53
White-winged Chough	19	8	21	48
Black-backed Magpie	26	18	45	89
White-backed Magpie	22	12	52	86
Blackbird	22	29	25	76
House Sparrow	8	7	34	49
Goldfinch	137	27	34	198
Starling	19	15	56	91