

VICTORIAN WADER STUDY GROUP



STUDY GROUP



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BULLETIN NO. 4

JULY 1981

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EDITORIAL

The last six months have seen a consistent increase in the amount of information the Group has collected on Victoria's wader population. Banding activities have added to the weight, moult and biometric data needed to gain a better understanding of the annual cycle of waders. Perhaps the most significant event in the field programme was the Group's participation in the first national wader count of the Australasian Wader Studies Group. The results for Victoria are documented in an article by John Martindale, the AWSG co-ordinator, in this issue. John is to be congratulated for his efforts of count organisation and data analysis.

The AWSG will be publishing this spring the first edition of its new Bulletin, to be called "The Stilt". Subscriptions are \$3.00 payable to The Treasurer, Mr David Henderson, P.O. Box 29, Legana, Tasmania, 7251.

A number of changes and new developments in VWSG have occurred in the last six months. David Robertson resigned recently as Editor. His efforts in the last 12 months have been of great help in getting the VWSG Bulletin established as an important avenue of communication within and beyond the Group. His work is gratefully acknowledged.

Julie Strudwick has recently handed over to Brenda Murlis as Treasurer. The treasury/secretaryship was a difficult task involving much more than the managing of Group finances. Julie has made a valuable contribution to getting the Group off the ground and for her hard work and sacrifice - a warm thank you. We wish Brenda Murlis all the best in her new role.

With the steadily increasing volume of data the Group is collecting from its banding activities, the task of analysis is becoming more and more drawn out and arduous. Many people are now involved in this activity, and it is hoped that a number of papers will be ready for publication in the coming year. To streamline the analysis of data we now have access to a computer at the Melbourne University Computer Science Department. This was organised by Charles Francis, who was out here from Canada for a year, and he has programmed the computer to take our data, straight off the existing data sheets. In addition, the computer has a variety of programs, all prepared by Charles. These can calculate means and standard deviations of weight and biometric data at monthly or fortnightly intervals and for each age group can tabulate moult results and provide information from year to year which can be used to quickly determine annual recruitment and mortality rates of the populations we are studying. In addition the computer results will streamline the preparation of banding schedules, and last but not least, tell us where we have made an error. Vive la technology!!

If we are to make full use of this marvellous tool, then people with a little spare time are needed to enter the Group's data into the computer. Thanks to the ingenious design of the data entry program, this task is not difficult and requires no knowledge of computers and only a short lesson on how to use it. If anyone is prepared to give an afternoon or evening of their time, please contact the Editor.

The highlight of the fieldwork programme was the March trip to New South Wales. This was a great success with 921 birds being caught at Botany Bay and the Hunter River estuary at Newcastle. All those involved in organising and accommodation are thanked.

The July 1981 to March 1982 field programme is published in this Bulletin. (N.B. Members please note recent changes to Jan. 1982 programme)

It involves more frequent field trips and with membership of the Group increasing we should be able to carry this programme through successfully. The Group can build on its success to date only with the continued help of all members so please continue to support field activities and renew your subscriptions for the coming 12 months.

BRETT LANE

WADER BANDING DETAILSCATCHES IN VICTORIA - JANUARY TO JUNE 1981

	<u>NEW</u>	<u>RETRAPS</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Pied Oystercatcher	39	18	57
Grey Plover	3	-	3
Eastern Golden Plover	1	-	1
Hooded Plover	9	-	9
Mongolian Plover	2	1	3
Double-banded Plover	132	10	142
Red Capped Plover	44	14	58
Turnstone	31	-	31
Grey-tailed Tattler	3	-	3
Bar-tailed Godwit	5	-	5
Red Knot	41	1	42
Sharptailed Sandpiper	40	-	40
Red-necked Stint	1123	380	1503
Curlew Sandpiper	196	20	216
	<u>1669</u>	<u>444</u>	<u>2113</u>

The above birds were caught at Werribee (1729), Queenscliff (250), Westernport Bay (56), Altona (31), Seaspray (18), Mud Island (13), Point Lonsdale (10), Inverloch (6).

Non Waders

Fairy Tern	61	6	67
Crested Tern	17	1	18
Little Tern	3	-	3
Silver Gull	1	-	1
White-faced Storm Petrel	1	-	1
	<u>83</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>90</u>

VICTORIAN WADER CATCHES
1975 TO 30 JUNE 1981

	<u>NEW</u>	<u>RETRAP</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Pied Oystercatcher	126	34	160
Sooty Oystercatcher	1	-	1
Masked Lapwing	15	-	15
Grey Plover	9	-	9
Lesser Golden Plover	23	4	27
Redkneed Dotterell	44	-	44
Hooded Plover	9	-	9
Mongolian Plover	12	1	13
Double banded Plover	381	11	392
Redcapped Plover	250	73	323
Blackfronted Plover	3	-	3
Blackwinged Stilt	6	-	6
Banded Stilt	-	-	-
Rednecked Avocet	17	-	17
Ruddy Turnstone	57	-	57
Eastern Curlew	3	-	3
Greytailed Tatter	3	-	3
Greenshank	1	-	1
Terek Sandpiper	4	-	4
Latham's Snipe	26	-	26
Bartailed Godwit	244	-	244
Red Knot	180	12	192
Great Knot	30	-	30
Sharptailed Sandpiper	1142	11	1153
Little Stint	1	-	1
Rednecked Stint	11001	1661	12662
Longtoed Stint	1	-	1
Curlew Sandpiper	4038	387	4425
Sanderling	2	-	2
	<u>17629</u>	<u>2194</u>	<u>19823</u>

29 species handled

The VWSG has also been involved (with local groups) in catching 1327 waders in Tasmania, 921 in New South Wales and 820 in South Australia. The grand total of waders handled by VWSG is 22,891.

LOCATIONS OF WADERS CAUGHT
BY VWSG IN VICTORIA TO
JUNE 1981

Werribee	15,094
Westernport Bay	2,440
Queenscliff	1,153
Corner Inlet	886
Seaford Swamp	98
Altona	83
Mud Island	35
Seaspray (Lake Reeve)	18
Point Lonsdale	10
Inverloch (Anderson's Inlet)	6
	<u>19,823</u>

These totals include both newly banded birds and retraps.

CATCHES AT BOTANY BAY and NEWCASTLE,
NEW SOUTH WALES, ON 19-22 MARCH 1981

	<u>New</u>	<u>Retrap</u>	<u>Total</u>
Lesser Golden Plover	1	-	1
Double-banded Plover	4	-	4
Redcapped Plover	9	-	9
Blacktailed Godwit	1	-	1
Bartailed Godwit	220	9	229
Red Knot	1	-	1
Great Knot	2	-	2
Sharptailed Sandpiper	565	4	569
Rednecked Stint	15	-	15
Curlew Sandpiper	88	2	90
	<u>906</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>921</u>

Visit of VWSG in conjunction with local banders.

THE VICTORIAN WADER COUNT
SUMMER 1981

The following results are those obtained by Victorian observers as part of the national count held on 21-22 February 1981. An account of the national results is published in the Australasian Wader Study Group Bulletin No 1, August 1981.

The count saw all Victorian coastal habitats well covered (90%). An exception was the exposed, oceanic shoreline of East Gippsland. The results for species, e.g. Hooded Plover, using this habitat are therefore unrealistic. In addition, this year saw the inclusion of several habitats not included in last summer's count (see Dann, VWSG Bulletin No 2, July 1980). They were some of the more important inland habitats e.g. the lakes of the Western District and between Swan Hill and Kerang and the sandy beaches and inter-tidal rock platforms of the south-west of the State.

The results are presented in Table 1, whilst Figures 1 and 2 compare the results with those obtained last year after adjustment for increased coverage and extra species considered. Some of the points to note are:

1. the consistency between the two years which suggests that the results we obtain are reliable;
2. the importance of the south-west for Sanderling, Hooded Plover and Turnstones;
3. that, although inland coverage was incomplete and many lakes were dry at the time, the habitat held some 17% of the Sharptailed Sandpiper population.

The value of Corner Inlet is becoming very evident.

- A. It holds about 80% of Victoria's "large" waders: the Eastern Curlew and Bar-tailed Godwit.
- B. It supports a large variety of species (16).
- C. Of the "small" waders it is the preferred area for Mongolian Plover (70%), Red Knot (68%) and Grey Plover (93%).

Increased coverage and the benefits of a February count (better weather, reduced temporary habitats and decreased likelihood of birds moving) resulted in a 37% increase in the number of birds recorded over last year. Despite this, the number of migratory waders counted was about 120,000 and, even allowing for incomplete coverage of the inland areas, is less than one was led to expect from the published data (e.g. Thomas, 1970, Emu 70: 145-154 guesstimated Victoria to hold a minimum of 250,000 and a maximum of 500,000).

The above are some of the facts that have become apparent from the holding of summer counts. Further analysis of other areas and of other States will no doubt reveal more. The continuation of these counts is the only way we will establish their validity and render them valuable for conservation purposes.

There are many other aspects of counting that these national counts cannot include. Most important are regular monthly "sample" counts at selected localities in order to demonstrate:

1. the level of importance throughout the year;
2. the movement of population peaks during migration and of over-wintering birds.

If you can help in your area or have results that you would like to see published, please contact a member of the VWSG committee or the AWSG Wader Co-ordinator at the RAOU (21 Gladstone St., Moonee Ponds, Vic 3039, phone 370 1272).

Finally, I would like to thank all those involved in making this count a success and especially those Westernport stalwarts and the Bird Observers Club who have been at it for some eight years now.

JOHN MARTINDALE

THE DATES OF THE NEXT NATIONAL SUMMER COUNT ARE 6 and 7 FEBRUARY 1982. PLEASE MAKE AN EFFORT TO BE AVAILBLE. CONTACT THE AWSG CO-ORDINATOR IF YOU CAN HELP.

TABLE ONE: VICTORIAN WADER COUNT: Feb. 1981 only

(Not comparable with 1979 data as more species and habitats considered).

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	TOTAL	%
Painted Snipe	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Pied Oystercatcher	12	9	47	64	56	-	124	7	823	19	21	-	1182	0.90
Sooty Oystercatcher	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	242	-	2	-	247	0.19
Masked Lapwing	4	37	188	371	349	149	464	54	41	55	12	927	2651	2.02
Banded Lapwing	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	14	15	-
Grey Plover	-	-	-	30	1	-	-	-	433	-	-	-	464	0.35
Lesser Golden Plover	-	71	-	184	47	-	74	92	-	-	-	-	468	0.36
Red-kneed Dotterel	-	-	-	10	12	10	-	-	-	42	-	122	196	0.15
Hooded Plover	35	100	33	16	-	-	4	-	3	7	3	-	201	0.15
Mongolian Plover	-	-	6	93	-	-	-	-	172	-	-	-	261	0.20
Double-banded Plover	3	26	-	11	6	-	2	11	2	-	-	-	61	-
Large Sand Plover	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	11	-	-	-	13	-
Red-capped Plover	8	102	129	253	220	-	68	72	2	106	72	931	1963	1.50
Black-fronted Plover	-	-	-	5	3	-	-	-	-	72	-	53	133	0.10
Black-winged Stilt	-	-	100	267	297	55	-	12	-	122	-	1047	1900	1.45
Banded Stilt	-	-	-	260	873	-	-	-	-	-	-	107	1240	0.95
Red-necked Avocet	-	-	-	16	159	-	-	-	-	-	-	472	647	0.49
Ruddy Turnstone	-	29	80	61	1	-	82	-	21	-	-	-	274	0.21
Eastern Curlew	-	-	-	104	9	0	914	170	1563	-	22	-	2782	2.12
Whimbrel	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	21	-	-	-	28	-
Little Curlew	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3	-
Wood Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	1	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-
Grey-tailed Tattler	-	3	4	8	-	-	21	-	-	-	-	-	36	-
Common Sandpiper	-	-	9	1	-	3	4	-	1	1	-	-	19	-
Greenshank	-	-	69	347	118	-	117	384	147	149	-	32	1363	1.04
Marsh Sandpiper	-	-	-	47	28	-	-	-	-	-	-	132	207	0.16
Terek Sandpiper	-	-	7	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	11	-
Latham's Snipe	-	-	1	66	-	26	-	-	-	4	-	-	97	-
Black-tailed Godwit	-	-	-	3	44	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	51	-
Bar-tailed Godwit	-	-	1	187	-	-	280	-	4965	-	52	-	5485	4.65
Red Knot	-	-	-	421	5	-	-	-	850	-	3	-	1279	0.98
Great Knot	-	-	-	216	-	-	-	-	74	-	1	-	291	0.22
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	-	3	402	5437	5456	182	213	405	80	3187	1	3038	18404	14.04
Pectoral Sandpiper	-	-	-	-	1	5	-	-	-	-	-	1	7	-
Red-necked Stint	863	240	786	12250	16905	5	3337	1456	14527	5397	107	2091	57964	44.22
Long-toed Stint	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Curlew Sandpiper	-	-	-	6505	13584	10	3222	123	5728	13	-	1256	30441	23.22
Dunlin	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Sanderling	232	40	339	-	-	-	-	-	80	-	-	-	691	0.53
Ruff	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	2	5	-
Wilson's Phalarope	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Ringed Plover	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
TOTALS:	1157	660	2202	27228	38181	448	8937	2786	29786	9175	296	10232	131088	
%	0.88	0.50	1.68	20.78	29.13	0.34	6.80	2.13	22.72	7.00	0.02	7.80		100.00

- A: South Aust. Border to Portland
- B: Portland to Port Fairy
- C: Port Fairy to Warnambool
- D: Bellarine Peninsula/Mud Island)
- E: Western Side) Port Phillip Bay.
- F: Eastern Side)
- G: Western Port Bay
- H: Andersons Inlet
- I: Shallow Inlet/Corner Inlet
- J: Gippsland Lakes
- K: Snowy River/Mallacoota
- L: Inland Habitats

FIGURE ONE: DISTRIBUTION OF WADER NUMBERS ALONG THE VICTORIAN COASTLINE.

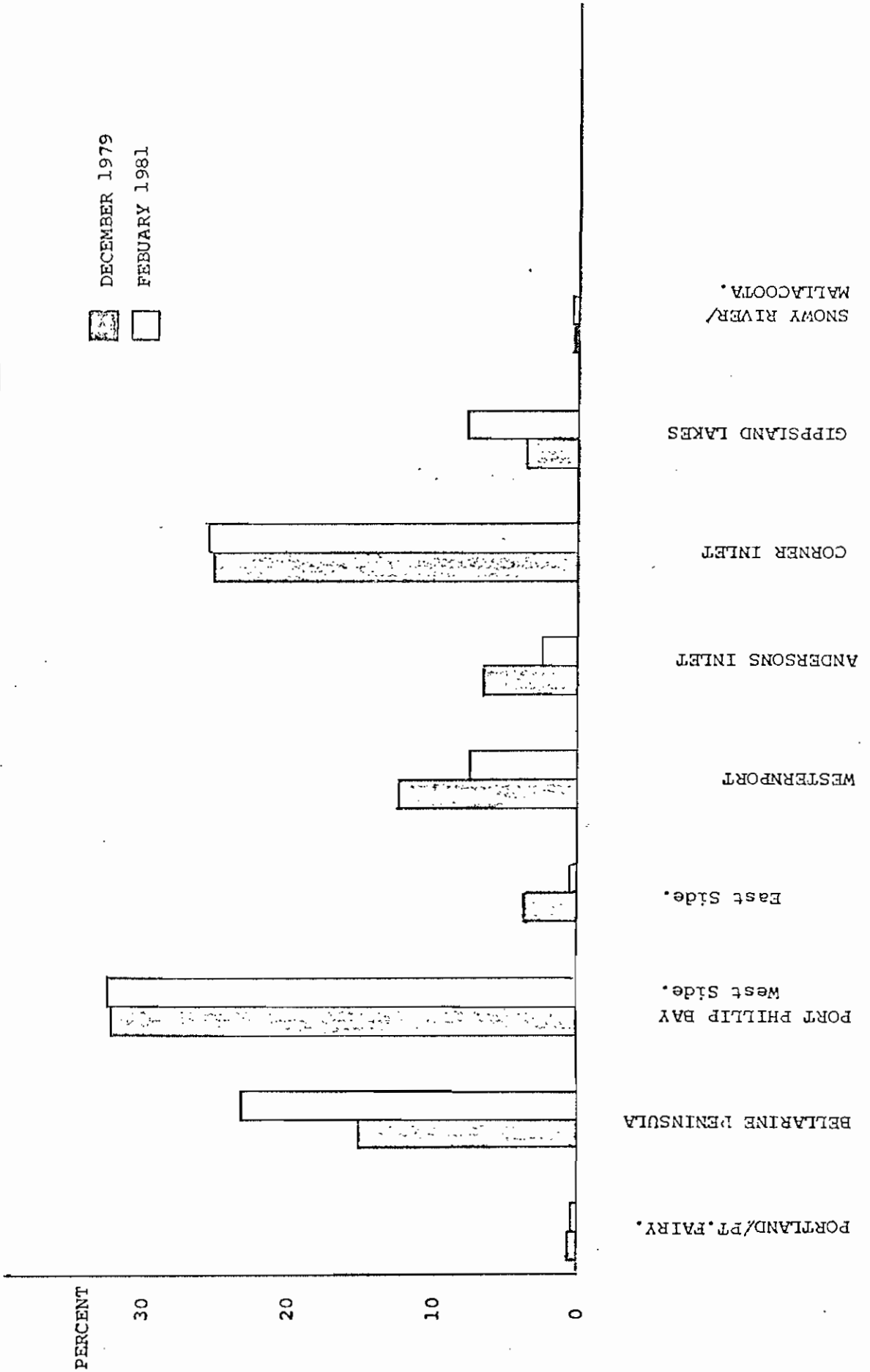
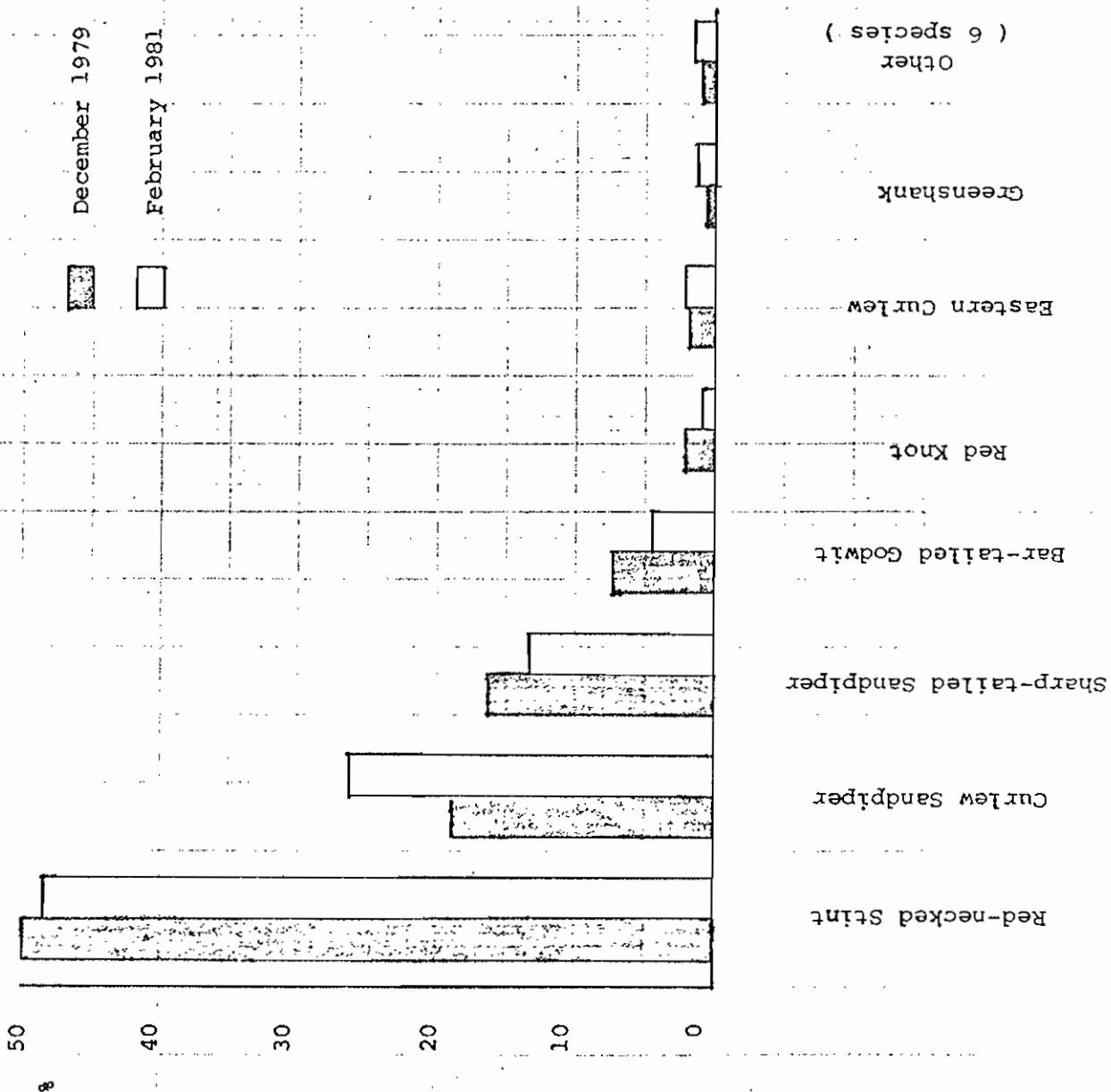


FIGURE TWO : RELATIVE ABUNDANCES OF EACH SPECIES



AGEING OF THE RED-NECKED STINT

In August of every year, thousands of adult Rednecked Stints start to arrive in Australia from their breeding grounds in N.E. Siberia and W. Alaska. These birds stay in Australia approx. seven months.

In October juvenile birds start arriving from their natal grounds and stay in Australia approx. 18 months.

The existing population of juvenile birds that arrived the previous year and have spent the winter in Australia are now classified as one year + birds.

In October of the year, the Rednecked Stints can be classified into Juveniles, 1 year+, and Adults by close examination in the hand, of moults, in particular the primaries. Primaries are from 1 to 10, moult starts from the inner primary No 1. The following is a guide to ageing Rednecked Stints from Oct to April of any year.

OCTOBER

Juveniles

Moult - New sets of primaries showing no signs of wear, new body feathers with rust edges to wing coverts, mantle and tertials.

Distance flown- One journey from natal grounds.

Adults

Moult - Primary moult commences. Edges of primaries showing wear, this wear being representative of the distance flown - one journey to Siberia and back to Australia. These primaries are lighter in colour than the juvenile primaries. Vestiges of rusty rufous coloured breeding plumage on neck and crown also running down the rump to upper tail coverts. Individual body feathers showing rusty colour wearing away, giving feathers serrated edges. No buff or rust edges to wing coverts.

Distance flown- To Siberia and back to Australia, at least once.

1 year +

Moult - Primary moult commences. Very old, faded and worn primaries, representative of the wear of one journey from Siberia plus one year's wear in Australia. No breeding plumage as a rule but occasional traces can appear. Sometimes a single buff tipped inner median covert is retained from the juvenile plumage.

Some (around 10%) Rednecked Stints moult a few of their outer primaries during their first year. Such birds can again be identified as 1 year +, by the presence of two different ages of primaries, until the new moult has proceeded to the stage when none of the old inner (juvenile) primaries are remaining.

Summary of October

The primaries of Juveniles, Adults and 1 year + birds, have different conditions of wear and colour. Juveniles have new primaries and rust edges to some coverts particularly inner median and tertials. Adults have some wear showing on tips of primaries plus tinges of breeding plumage on the body. 1 year + birds have very old and worn primaries and only occasionally show traces of breeding plumage.

NOVEMBER

As for October

DECEMBER

Juveniles

Moult - No primary moult. Inner median and tertial coverts still showing rust tips.

Adults

Moult - Continuing primary moult, outer primaries 8, 9, 10 becoming more worn.

1 year +

Moult - Continuing primary moult, outer primaries 9, 10 now extremely worn. Not always distinguishable from adults.

Summary of December

The primaries of Juvenile, Adult and 1 year + birds, showing different stages of wear and moult, with 1 year + having the oldest primaries.

JANUARY

Juveniles

Moult - No primary moult, and primaries now showing the beginnings of wear. Rust colour to coverts of tertials still showing.

Adults

Moult - Some birds complete their primary moult, thus showing a new set of primaries.

1 year +

Moult - Not separable from Adults.

Summary of January

As 1 year + birds moult primary 10, they can no longer be distinguished from Adult birds, so from now on they are classified as Adult birds.

FEBRUARYJuveniles

Moult - A few birds commence moult of outermost 1 to 5 primaries.

Adults

Moult - Moult completed. Now exhibit newer feathers than juveniles.

MARCHJuveniles

Moult - No primary moult except on small percentage, as in February. Primary feathers now showing more wear. No breeding plumage. Rust on coverts or tertials mainly confined to innermost median coverts and occasionally absent completely.

Adults

Moult - Primary moult completed. Traces of new rusty rufous breeding plumage on crown and neck.

Summary of March

Condition of wear of the primaries is now reversed, compared with spring. Adults have new primaries and new traces of breeding plumage; juveniles have old primaries.

APRILJuveniles

Moult - As March. Those undertaking partial wing moult complete.

Adults

Moult - Considerable increase of breeding plumage prior to departure.

Summary of April

Most of the Adult Stints have started their migration. Juvenile birds will now stay in Australia for the winter and will be in winter plumage for that period. The following October of next year with the new influx of Juvenile birds arriving in Australia, our resident Juveniles are then classified as 1 year +. They will complete a primary moult and undergo a partial body moult into breeding plumage by April of the next year, completing it before arrival on the breeding grounds. They will migrate with the existing populations of Adult Rednecked Stints to N.E. Siberia and W. Alaska.

YEAR A												YEAR B												YEAR C											
J F M A				M J J A				S O N D				J F M A				M J J A				S O N D				J F M A				M J J A				S O N D			
				Juvenile				1 yr +				Adult								Adult															
Adult				Adult								Adult								Adult															

My thanks to Clive Minton for his tuition in reading the moults and for Brett Lane's assistance.

BERRICE S FOREST

COLOUR-BANDED HOODED PLOVERS

The recent survey of the Victorian coast for Hooded Plovers was very successful (see last Bulletin). The final total after all results were in was 475 birds. I have had a number of reports of comparatively large concentrations of Hooded Plovers on beaches this winter, and if anyone has seen or sees Hooded Plovers could they please jot down the numbers in flocks, location (include sketch map if possible), date, and how long they stayed there if repeated visits are made, and send the information to me.

Recently, the group managed to catch nine Hooded Plovers and colour-band them at Point Lonsdale. If you are on ocean beaches and see Plovers please check them for colour bands. The combination is red left-leg, metal right-leg. This colour should be easy to see on sandy beaches.

BRETT A LANE
518 Malvern Road
East Prahran 3181

RECOVERIES OF BANDED BIRDS

The original banding details are on the top line and the recovery details on the lower line. Local retraps and recoveries are not included. Pullus = unfledged chick (nestling). Werribee = The Spit and/or the adjacent sewage farm.

Pied Oystercatcher

100-82087	Adult	8.3.80	Werribee	
	Found dead	23.9.80	Corio Bay	13 km S.E.
100-81163	Juvenile	28.4.79	Werribee	
	Recaptured	1.3.80	Phillip Island	82 km SE
	Recaptured	2.5.81	Werribee	82 km NW
100-82065	Adult	8.3.80	Werribee	
	Recaptured	3.5.81	Queenscliff	28 km SSE
100-82090	Adult	8.3.80	Werribee	
	Recaptured	13.6.81	Queenscliff	29 km SSE
100-82080	Adult	8.3.80	Werribee	
	Recaptured	13.6.81	Queenscliff	29 km SSE
100-82079	Adult	8.3.80	Werribee	
	Recaptured	14.6.81	Queenscliff	29 km SSE

These recoveries are further evidence of the extensive local movements of Pied Oystercatchers (see also the colour banding records).

Double-banded Plover

The bird banded as a breeding adult (female) in 1977 at Lake Tekapo, New Zealand, and subsequently seen at Pt Wilson, Werribee, in June 1979 (recognised by individual colour bands), was again present at the usual location (between 6.9.80 and 25.10.80) during the 1980 breeding season - the fourth successive year. See VWSG Bulletin No 2 for full details of previous sightings.

Rednecked Stint

032-26902	Adult	12.4.80	Werribee	
	Recaptured	7.12.80	Hobart, Tasmania	610 km SSE
032-11704	Adult	4.12.74	Stockyard Point, Westernport Bay	
	Recaptured	23.11.80	Yallock Creek	13 km NNE
	(almost 6 yrs since		banding)	
032-19153	Juvenile	13.4.79	Werribee	
	Recaptured	24.1.81	Mud Island	32 km SE
032-14781	Adult	6.11.78	Werribee	
	Recaptured	24.3.79	"	
	"	22.11.79	Hobart, Tas	610 km SSE
	"	7.2.81	" "	

Curlew Sandpiper

040-93763	Juvenile Recaptured	28.11.78 15.3.81	Werribee Queenscliff	25 km SSE
040-93425	Free-flying Recaptured	22.1.77 5.4.81	Werribee Queenscliff	25 km SSE
041-00490	Adult Recaptured	5.9.80 5.4.81	Werribee Queenscliff	25 km SSE

NON-WADERS BANDED OR RECOVERED IN VICTORIA BY VWSGCrested Tern

070-.6556	Pullus	Dec.1964	Coorong <u>or</u> Beachport, SA	
	<u>or</u>	Dec. 1973	Eyre Peninsula, SA	400-600 kmE
	Recaptured	24.1.81	Mud Island	

Because of one illegible number on the band it was not possible to ascertain which of the three possible banding dates/locations was correct.

071-51100	Juvenile	24.1.81	Mud Island	
	Caught in fishing line	20.5.81	Westernport Bay	67 km E

Fairy Tern

040-28330	Pullus	28.1.66	Geelong	
	Recaptured (age 15½ yrs)	14.6.81	Queenscliff	29 km ESE
040-28440	Pullus	10.1.76	Moolap Spit	
	Recaptured	14.6.81	Queenscliff	25 km SE

Silver Gull

082-40783	Pullus	31.12.79	Corner Inlet	
	Band read from photographs	23.3.81	Port Albert	8 km WSW

FURTHER SIGHTINGS OF COLOUR MARKED BIRDSColour-dyed (yellow/orange)

		<u>Distance Moved</u>	<u>Observer</u>
<u>Redcapped Plover</u>			
- 24.8.80	Stockyard Point, Westernport Bay (1 out of 4 birds present)	85 km E.S.E.	Eric Jones
- 2.11.81	" " (1 out of 15 birds present) (probably same bird)		

This bird was colour dyed at Werribee in the period April-June 1980. This is the furthest movement so far of a colour dyed Redcapped Plover.

Doublebanded Plover

Although 50 birds were colourdyed at Point Wilson in May 1981 none of these have been reported away from that location, in spite of regular searches of the populations present at Altona and Queenscliff.

Colour-bandedPied Oystercatcher (Blue = banded at Werribee)

- 28.5.81	Altona (1 out of 3 birds present)	25 km N.E.	Brett Lane
- 7.6.81	Altona (2 out of 6 birds present)	25 km N.E.	Claire Appleby
- 26.1.81	Mud Island (6 out of 36 birds present)	32 km S.E.	Brett Lane

Several colour banded Pied Oystercatchers were retrapped at different locations and these are included in the lists of recoveries.

CANNON NETTING FOR BEGINNERS

Much has been said about the art of setting a cannon net (mostly by the same person). It is a technique only vaguely understood by most birdwatchers and probably not at all by the general public. In this paper an attempt will be made to describe the method most widely used.

The novice netter newly introduced to the scene of operations at the Werrabee Sewage Farm may be inclined to approach his work with restrained enthusiasm. But he should not allow himself to be discouraged. It is rewarding work.

The concept is simple. A large net is folded and concealed at a favourite high-tide roosting area for waders. Heavy projectiles (rather like the weights on sash windows) attached by rope to the leading edge of the net are loaded into primitive cannon. When fired, the projectiles carry the net out over what is optimistically called the catching area.

Choosing the site requires much skill and patient observation. A reconnoitring survey is usually made some days before the shoot. To set the net the base line is marked with sticks and two or three team members spill the net from its bag along this line. Pegged tautly through loops along its length the rear rope forms a firm base. By grasping the leading edge and gathering the net in hand over hand it can be folded concertina-like onto itself, any grot of course being removed. To allow a little flexibility and increase the range of the net the base line is secured by elastic and cord jump ropes. These replace the loops on the base line on the final stages of preparation.

While this has been going on others will have been digging in four cannon about one pace behind the net each opposite to the centre of the group of ropes which are shackled to the missiles. Do not be alarmed to find that the two outer cannon have three ropes and the two inner ones five. The reason for this may be historical rather than practical. The two inner cannon point straight forward while those at each end point outwards at about 40 degrees, aimed at small markers placed thirteen paces in front of the ends of the net.

The setting of the vertical angle or elevation of the cannon requires some care. Under normal conditions the angle is right if one can see down the barrel while poised in an upright position on one knee from a spot three paces from the muzzle (and of course facing it). Adjustments may have to be made to allow for strength and direction of the wind and slope of the ground. Surreptitious attempts to vary this angle for private experimental purposes should be avoided as they would inevitably come to the attention of the authorities.

The cannon emplacements are now filled in leaving only a short length of muzzle protruding. The cannon are then ready to receive the projectiles. When this stage is reached it is recommended that no one should walk or stand in front of the net. Otherwise the breeding biology and fossil records of wader netters could be adversely affected.

Tidy up the net and the ropes, garnish lightly with grot for camouflage and this part of the work is finished.

Let us assume for the moment that we have a small well trained keen and efficient team. If this be so, much of the remaining work will now have been quietly completed. A firing position will have been chosen some 200 to 250 yards away (this distance is a personal impression - it may be shorter) providing concealment and at the same time commanding a view of the net and catching area, the latter being defined by small cairns of local material (bushes or beer cans) or other markers. An electric cable will have been laid from the firing point to the net and connected to the detonating wires by a dropper. (If you are having difficulty with these technical terms please refer to the glossary in Volume I of the Bulletin.) Shortly before firing the cable will be connected to a firing box. A light line with pieces of small stuff tied to it, known as a jiggler, will also be in place, leading from the firing position to the net but lying a few inches in front of it. This when jerked is designed to move birds away from the danger area in front of the net and from the net itself. How far they move may of course be critical to the success of the operation.

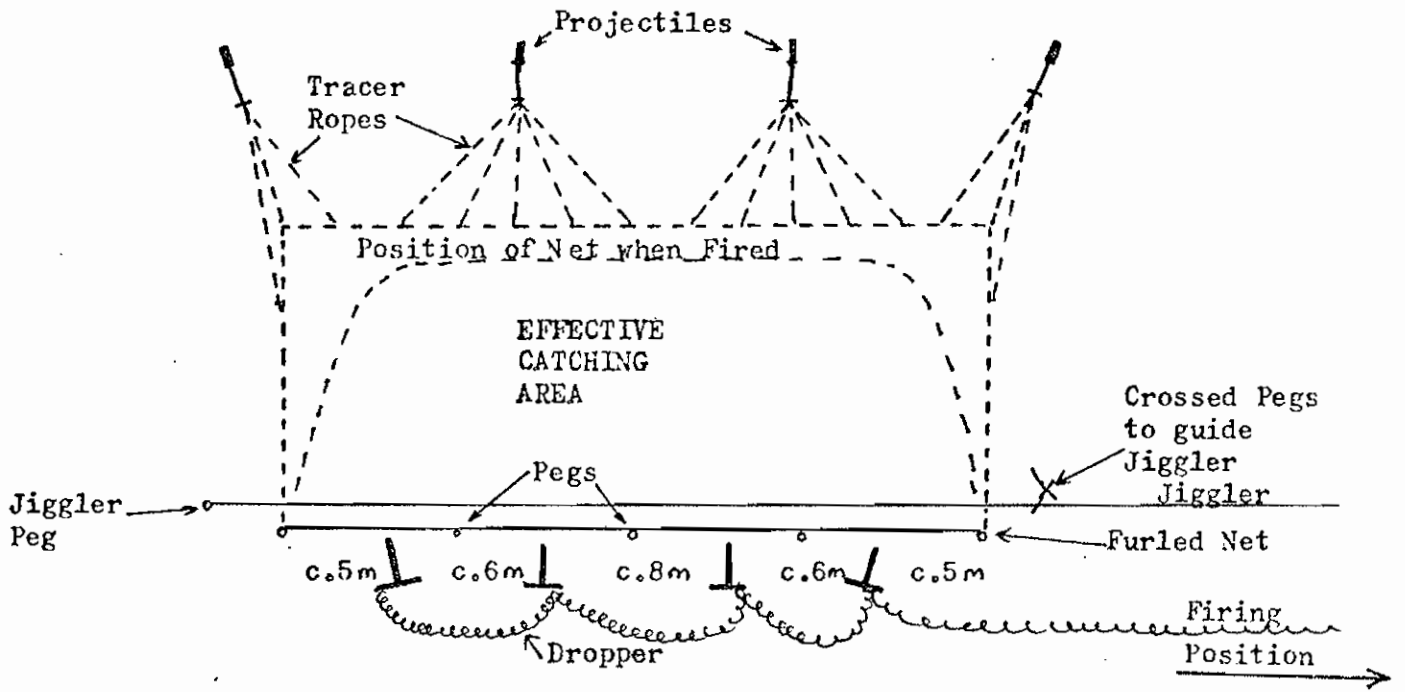
A cache is made, at some convenient intermediate spot, of covering material, keeping cages and bird bags.

At this stage one might regard the completed arrangements with satisfaction and be inclined to relax. But high tide need not be awaited in idleness. There is always equipment to repair, other sets of cartridges to be recharged and other cannon to be reloaded.

When birds return to the general roosting area some twinkling may be necessary to encourage them into the catching area. One or perhaps two members of the team are sent out to gently shepherd the birds in the right direction. The twinklers can usually act on their own initiative but at times the firing position takes control and, through walkie-talkies, directs them in much the same way as a Welsh sheep dog.* This work can involve much crawling on hands and knees and slithering on the stomach, often through water, and is usually reserved for the fit enthusiast.

It would be agreeable to assume that all this care and trouble would be attended by success. It usually is. But sometimes the birds assemble elsewhere (often just outside the catching area) or in the danger area and no firing takes place. Very occasionally through some mischance there is an air shot.

* It must be understood of course that Welsh sheep dogs are still controlled by whistle, not by walkie talkie



Immediately the net is fired most of the birds leap out of harm's way and all the team members leap to their feet in a sort of Le Mans start and rush at their various speeds to the leading edge of the net to lift it out of any water and to cover the birds with sacking and other material to relax them. Remember NEVER to stand on the net or the covering material: this strict rule not only protects the birds but also the budding bander who will soon find out how dangerous it is to flout it. If the catch is large keeping cages will be put up to hold the birds until they can be processed. They are banded, weighed, measured and recorded. Sometimes they are photographed and sometimes blood samples are taken.

Cannon netting involves periods of high excitement and euphoria interspersed with stints of hard slogging and waiting. There are moments for reflection; quiet summer evenings at sunset on the Spit listening to the plaintive calls of the Black Swans are hard to beat. There are surprises too: a distant shingle beach may suddenly lift into the air and be transformed into a shimmering shoal of flying fish. An illusion quickly shattered by an expert (there is always at least one nearby) who identifies them as Rednecked Stints and Curlew Sandpipers.

Ideally there should be an element of military discipline and early training on a battle course comes in handy. One must be able to carry heavy loads over long distances (two cannon seem to weigh as much as a 2" mortar), be prepared to carry out orders, be adept if twinkling at making covered approaches, be prepared to keep one's head down when birds are on the move (this is difficult - a wader watcher's curiosity far outstrips that of an infantryman), operate a walkie-talkie and so on. Above all one must be willing to do one's share of the work. Membership of the Jiggler Winders and Allies Trades Association will afford no comfort here.

Finally dress is informal. If you haven't a dirty shirt a clean one will do so long as it is of a reasonably cryptic colour.

JOHN DAWSON

V.W.S.G.B.

This brief article categorises a subgroup or a syndrome, discussed here only with respect to cannon netting, which has been apparent within the VWSG for some time and identifies some of the indicative manifestations. The interpretation of the "B" of the title will depend on the reader's prediction; "Best" and "Bludgers" are two extremes which suggest themselves. First, let us dismiss a common misapprehension. Membership of the subgroup is not restricted to poms or those with immediate pommie ancestry although it is admitted that such a qualification, implying as it does generations of forebears skilled in the art, would suffice were it not for the fierceness of the competition.

The day starts, of course, with the choice of strategy. Many factors affect this; the time of start, the location, and the intended catch being the most obvious. For very early starts, a bleary eyed appearance and the announcement that you have come straight from a party and have had no sleep will enhance your reputation for enthusiasm and draw no opprobrium for your lack of effort during the day. A dress suit would be the clincher. For later starts, particularly at little known sites, a latish arrival is indicated and excused by your exploratory work in finding vast flocks of waders some distance away. This sets up the possibility of the "oojahmacappivy", or long distance twinkle, which will keep you comfortable in idleness for many hours. The strategy requires a delicate touch to be effective; overdone, it can lead to an embarrassing decision to change site. A mix of strategies is, however, essential if the individual is to avoid a condign reputation; this predicates that some of the strategies give the appearance of application to the endeavour at hand.

Several tactics are well known and eagerly applied when setting nets, for example fixing jigglers and firing cables, the former being lighter work but requiring the effort of driving three pegs into the unyielding mud. Less rarely used is the technique of kneeling down by the side of the net giving the appearance of involvement; one can do this for long periods without attracting either unwanted attention or strain. Bring your own screwdriver and you can be sure of wiring up the firing cables; the nominate group's never appear quickly. Depending on location, volunteer, only when there is plenty of help, to get camouflage material; it takes you miles from the action and can be very idle. Possibly the most effective technique is the trip to the trailer for something which you have previously hidden under a net bag; not only is it restful, it also looks keen.

When the nets are set, there is a grand opportunity for rest and relaxation by all except those dragged in to twinkle. The wearing of bright and garish clothes does much to minimise one's chances of selection for this arduous and unrewarding task.

The occasional sprained ankle, or, preferably, a chronic knee, is even better in this respect as it also precludes a run to the net after firing. But by far the most effective technique is a job at the firing position; it gives a perfect view of the proceedings, is quiet and restful, avoids twinkling, gives a short run to the firing position without covering material, appears participative, and gives the opportunity both to misdirect twinklers and to fire the wrong net if it seems that too many birds will be caught. It is a position eagerly sought. The acknowledged master of this technique is known to all, never seen anywhere else, has a mythical reputation for keenness and a waistline that bears eloquent witness to the technique's effectiveness.

At the net, the general chaos is screen to a legion of methods which are widely known and happily applied. What is less well known is that this chaos is unnecessary and is the logical consequence of careful and empathetic orchestration by the subtler masters of the craft who, by so doing, establish an atmosphere in which, although it appears otherwise, they continue to select the task most appropriate to their inclinations in the next stage of the proceedings. If you can, identify the individuals who always seem to have the easiest processing job whatever the circumstances of the catch. This evidence of mastery over minions must surely be a joy to the Great Bird Ringer in the Sky, if not to Machiavelli.

At the end of the day, when the requirement for physical effort again occurs, elementary techniques are often to the fore, bad backs, sick children, guests to dinner etc. These are generally the efforts of tyros. The adepts rarely use them. As a paradigm of excellence, the following may suffice. To volunteer, for work back at the Hilton, when it has been privately established that there is no such necessity, is masterly. It evidences to the leader one's enthusiasm and leaves him with a last memory that can only discount any earlier animadversions on the same.

Two final comments are in order. First, as should be apparent, the active VWSGB member holds as self evident that the success and pleasure of birdringing are derived from the work of others. Second, success in the art is very largely a matter of individual style and secrecy; it is for these reasons that only the superficial mysteries are revealed in the preceding paragraphs.

KEN ROGERS

W A N T E D -YOUR SLIDES !

The V.W.S.G. has decided to form a SLIDE LIBRARY from which any member of the group may borrow slides for the purpose of giving lectures, etc. However, its successful formation depends entirely on receiving donations of 35 mm slides (originals or duplicates) covering all aspects of:

- * bird-catching (mist-netting, cannon-netting, "twinkling", firing, etc.)
- * bird-banding (banding, dyeing, weighing, recording, etc.)
- * maps (breeding grounds, migration routes, etc.)
- * the birds themselves (wild or captive, in all plumage phases)

Please look through your files and see what you can let us have. Send your slides, securely packed (a small padded post bag available from any post office is suitable) direct to:

Ralph and Daffi Keller
PO Box 123
Ivanhoe, Vic 3079
(Tel: 49 6054)

who will be in charge of this new V.W.S.G. Slide Library.

Many thanks.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO BULLETIN

If the V.W.S.G. Bulletin is to be successful and reflect the interests and activities of group members, then as members you should contribute. If you have any articles or papers on the results of wader studies, accounts of any activities you are undertaking, amusing stories, wader counts from, as yet, undocumented sites in Victoria, or requests for information, then please send them to :

Brett Lane
Editor, V.W.S.G. Bulletin
518 Malvern Road
East Prahran, Vic 3181

NUMBERS OF WADERS "PROCESSED" BY VWSG IN VICTORIA IN EACH MONTH TO JUNE 1981

"Processing" includes measuring wing length, bill length (where appropriate) and weight; also recording full details of primary wing feather moult (if any). Additional wing moult data has been gathered on some birds which were not fully processed. The table below will be used to plan fieldwork, with the objective of obtaining usable samples (preferably on at least 50 birds) of data for each month of the year for all the main study species.

	<u>J</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>J</u>	<u>A</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>O</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Pied Oystercatcher	1	-	51	28	30	29	-	-	-	-	-	18	157
Sooty Oystercatcher	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Masked Lapwing	-	-	9	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	13
Grey Plover	-	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	9
Lesser Golden Plover	2	3	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	10
Redkneed Dotterell	-	-	-	20	-	4	-	-	12	1	5	-	43
Hooded Plover	-	-	-	-	-	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Mongolian Plover	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9
Doublebanded Plover	-	-	3	9	136	229	-	15	-	-	-	-	392
Redcapped Plover	1	12	18	102	66	29	27	-	8	3	8	1	275
Blackfronted Plover	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
Blackwing Stint	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	6
Rednecked Avocet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	13	2	17
Ruddy Turnstone	1	-	22	27	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	4	55
Eastern Curlew	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Greytailed Tatler	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Greenshank	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Terek Sandpiper	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	4
Latham's Snipe	-	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	-	26
Bartailed Godwit	-	-	-	1	-	4	-	-	34	-	-	186	239
Red Knot	18	21	55	34	-	-	-	-	2	7	29	26	192
Great Knot	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	15	-	-	12	30
Sharptailed Sandpiper	294	103	20	2	-	-	-	1	154	47	144	204	969
Little Stint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Rednecked Stint	868	253	2127	1590	42	113	120	62	249	344	1614	1013	8395
Longtoed Stint	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Curlew Sandpiper	331	168	503	59	-	3	2	15	64	38	418	399	2000
Sanderling	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
													<u>12864</u>

The majority of the 1327 birds caught in Tasmania (Nov 1979), 820 birds in South Australia (Feb 1980), and 921 birds in New South Wales (Mar 1981) were also processed.

V.W.S.G. FINANCIAL STATEMENT
1/7/80 to 30/6/81
 (i.e. last financial year)

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>EXPENDITURE</u>
Membership Fees/Renewals 615.00	Bank Fees/Exchange 12.96
Subscriptions to Bulletin 20.00	Stationery/Postage 48.33
Donations 16.00	Repairs/Maintenance 49.95
Sale of Bulletins 48.00	New Equipment 122.90
Hire of Equipment 25.00	Printing of Bulletins 134.77
\$ 724.00	\$ 368.91
Cash in Bank 1/7/80 54.70	Cash in Bank 30/6/81 279.33
Cash on Hand 1/7/80 42.33	Cash/Cheques on Hand 30/6/81 172.79
\$ 821.03	\$ 821.03
<u>Hire of Equipment</u>	
Fishers & Wildlife (hire of cannon nets) \$ 25.00	<u>New Equipment</u>
	Pliers 6.90
	Circuit Tester 12.50
	Radio 49.50
	100g. Pesola Balance 26.00
	Eqpt for Keeping Cages 28.00
	\$ 122.90

V.W.S.G. FINANCIAL STATEMENT
2/6/79 to 30/6/81
 (i.e. since V.W.S.G. started)

Membership Fees/Renewals \$ 970.00	Cheque Book/Bank Fees \$ 27.44
Sale of Bulletins 56.00	Stationery/Postage 64.05
Subscriptions to Bulletin 20.00	Repairs/Maintenance 100.95
Donations 189.95	New Equipment 447.32
Hire of Equipment 25.00	Printing of Bulletins 169.07
	Cash in Bank 279.33
	Cash/Cheques on Hand 172.79
\$ 1,260.95	\$ 1,260.95
<u>Donations</u>	
V.O.R.G. for radios 150.00	<u>New Equipment</u>
Sundry amounts 39.95	Mist Nets 92.00
\$ 189.95	Spray Gun 1.80
	Eqpt for 2nd Cannon Net 51.12
<u>Hire of Equipment - Cannon Nets</u>	3 Walkie Talkie radios (V.O.R.G.) 148.50
Fisheries & Wildlife \$ 25.00	1 " " (V.W.S.G.) 49.50
	Mat. for keeping cages 59.00
	Pliers 6.90
	Circuit Tester 12.50
	100g. Pesola Balance 26.00
	\$ 447.32

VICTORIAN WADER STUDY GROUP

DATES FOR FIELD WORK

N.B. MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE CHANGES
TO JAN. 1982 PROGRAMME

	<u>TIME OF HIGH TIDE(SAT.)</u>
August 29-30 : Werribee *	1510
Sept 12-13 : Werribee	1338
Sept 26-27 : Werribee *	1337
Oct 3 (10.00 am) (Sat.) : AGM and VWSG Wader Symposium (at CDTM's home - 10 Omama Rd., Murrumbeena)	
Oct 17-18 : Queenscliff	1426
Oct 31-Nov 1(3?) : Werribee * (and/or Andersons Inlet ?)	1801
Nov 14-15 : Westernport Bay - Yallock Creek & Rhyll	1513
Nov 28-29 : Werribee *	1646
Dec 19-20 : Queenscliff & Werribee	0951
Dec 27-28 (Sun-Mon) : Werribee *	1604
Jan 1-5 (Fri-Tues) : Corner Inlet	
Jan 30 - Feb 1 (Sat-Mon) : Werribee *	
Feb 6-7 : Summer Wader Count	
Feb 20-21 : Mud Island	
early March (Labour Day weekend ?) : Coorong, South Australia (with S.A.O.S. Wader Group)	

* Dates when mist netting at Werribee is planned to take place, in addition to cannon netting

All dates, except those marked, are weekends. Normal meeting time will be 5 hrs before high tide, at the shearing sheds ("Werribee Hilton"), Beach Rd., Werribee Sewage Farm. However when mist netting is probable, the team will normally meet at 5.30 pm on the Friday evening.

Please phone CDTM, or one of the other contacts below, a few days before each planned fieldwork to advise your availability and to obtain final information on rendezvous time/location. The programme is subject to change depending on recce information, availability of personnel etc.

CONTACTS (* note new address/phone number)

Clive Minton	-	568.1017 (home)*		
		267.5800 (office)		
	Address*-	10 Omama Rd., Murrumbeena Vic 3163		
David Robertson	-	458.1421 (home)		
Julie Strudwick *	-	375.2346 (home)	370.1272	(RAOU office)
Brett Lane	-	51.2152 (home)		
Ira Savage	-	052-216253 (home)		
Berrice Forest	-	786.9717 (home)		
John Martindale	-	370.1272 (RAOU office)		
Peter Dann *	-	059-568395 (home)		
Brenda Murlis	-	874.2860 (home)	874.1419	(office)
John Dawson	-	787.2082 (home)	781.2791	(office)

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL FORM

Mrs Brenda Murlis
Treasurer
Victorian Wader Study Group
34 Centre Road
VERMONT VIC 3133

I would like to join/renew membership of the Victorian
Wader Study Group as a * Full/Country/Associate/Interstate/
Student member. Enclosed is cheque/money order for \$.....
in payment of membership fee for the year ended 30 June 1982.

Full membership	\$10 per annum	} 1 July to 30 June
Country, Interstate, Student, Associate membership	\$ 5 per annum	

* cross out whichever is not applicable

NAME
(please use block letters)

ADDRESS
.....Post Code

TELEPHONE
(please include STD prefix)

SIGNATURE

