Alan Danks (left), Alan Rose (centre) and Ian Wheeler examine an elliot trap and drift fence used to catch Noisy Scrub-Birds at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve.

Noisy Scrub-bird on move

By COLLEEN HENRY-HALL

THE rain was pouring down at Two Peoples Bay Nature Reserve.

It was going to be a slow day, an oddity for the people working on the latest translocation of the Noisy Scrub-bird.

Although the lack of wind would have been perfect for catching male Scrub-Birds with the mist net, Project Coordinator and Reserve Manager Alan Danks will not handle the birds if they get wet because they lose body heat quickly.

The translocation of this rare species of almost flightless bird will establish colonies away fron the main population at Two Peoples Bay.

This is the third translocation: the first, to Manypeaks in 1985, the second to Nuyts Wilderness in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park in 1986, and the third this year to a different spot in the park.

It's an operation that would be impossible without the help of many dedicated volunteers and CALM staff over six weeks, 12 hours a day, seven days a week, of hard, slogging work.

The "help" on this day and over many of the last few weeks came from Manjimup Forest Ranger Ian Wheeler, Stirling National Park Ranger Alan Rose, Otto Meuller and Arvy Pocock.

Alan said people volunteer to help because they're interested in working with birds and intrigued by the fact that these are an endangered species.

They also want to learn about the unique management techniques used on the reserve, and because "it's an opportunity to see Two Peoples from a different point of view."

The work requires fitness — many hours are spent in the bush looking for nests (necessary for the capture of female Scrub-Birds), and at release, it's often a half-day's walk in the bush with a bird in a box strapped on your back.

It requires patience — a capture method for the male Scrub-Bird uses a tape-recorded territorial call to lure the bird to the net, which often means 10 to 15 minutes of absolute stillness followed by instant action when the bird is in the right spot.

It is laborious — to set up the mist net, a 2m line of scrub has to be cleared; a metres-long drift fence must be set up in another capture method.

But talk to anyone who has worked on a translocation and you'll know it is all worth it.

Ian talked about the Sunday they released the five birds: "It was great because as soon as I let this male out, he sang."

Singing establishes male territory, and setting up territories will be a key factor in the birds' survival in their new home.

There is the tension and excitement of crouching in the bush, waiting for a small, rare bird to launch itself into your mistnet.

Alan Danks said: "Once you miss, there's no second try, because that male is unlikely to make the same mistake twice."

Alan likes to have a core of people who come back year after year, people who do the demanding job of mistnet capture.

First-time volunteers look after the birds that have been captured, tend the drift lines, look for nests.

Ideally they should spend the entire six weeks working on the project; if they can spend only one or two weeks, they don't have enough time to learn all they should.

Each volunteer requires intensive induction and supervision, so Alan wants only a few first-time volunteers.

He said: "It's an excellent opportunity for people to become involved in and see the Reserve and do work they wouldn't normally be doing.

Here too they have contact with a species that has a place in the folklore and history of WA.

The success of this year's translocation of 15 birds, eight male and seven female, won't be known for at least a couple of years: only by monitoring the area for male song will Alan be able to tell if territories have been set up.

The first job after releasing them is to find them, Alan said, and that has proven difficult in Walpole-Nornalup.

"This will be the last lot to the Park until we get evidence of their breeding there," he said.

TREE-RATS S

By GORDON FRIEND

WILDLIFE researchers from three States recently teamed up to study three species of tree-rate in a remote area of the Kimberley.

I joined Anne Kerle, Mike Fleming (N.T. Conservation Commission, Alice Springs), Cath Kemper (S.A. Museum) and Marie Senn (University of Adelaide) for three weeks in the Mitchell Plateau area where populations of the Brush-tailed Rabbit-rat, Golden-backed Tree-rat and Blac-footed Tree-rat occur.

Although these species had been recorded from the area in earlier surveys by CALM and WA Museum personnel, detailed information on the species' respective habitat preferences, nest sites and feeding and general behaviour in the wild was lacking.

The team located relatively large populations of the Brush-tailed and Golden-backed species, and four individuals (2 male, 2 female) of the latter species were fitted with radio-collars and tracked for about a week.

This provided valuable new information and showed that the Golden-backed Tree-rats in the study area were living in hollows in old *Eucalyptus*